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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

Mirror of the Soul

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English-language version produced by Studio Proteus for Dark Horse Comics, Inc.

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL Vol. 13: MIRROR OF THE SOUL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

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translation
Dana Lewis & Toren Smith

lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

Mirror of the Soul

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The arms of the *swastika*, which point in a clockwise direction, are generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century [ca. 1782–3]. *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

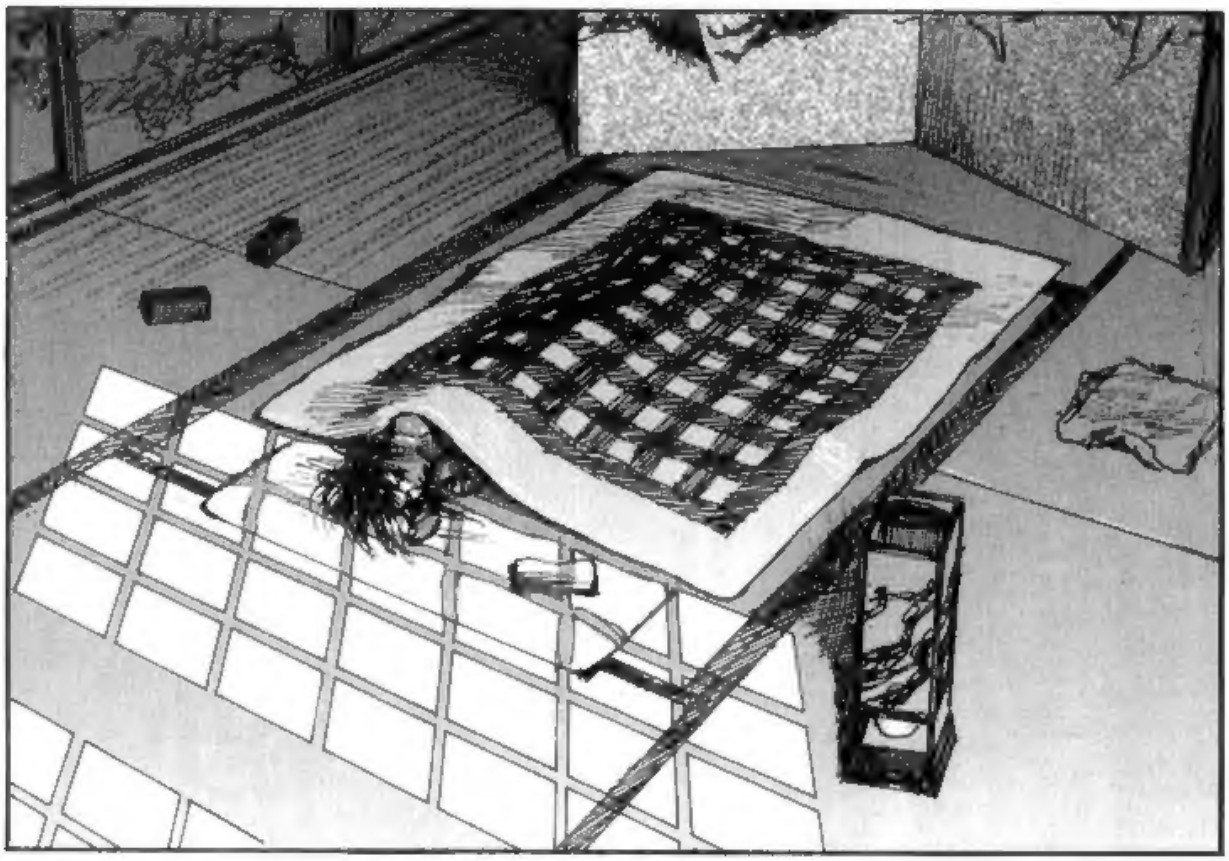
The Artwork

The creator of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, Westernized manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and re-pasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue

Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the illustrations, we decided to leave those in their original Japanese. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in typical samurai manga and is considered to be one of the features that has made *Blade* such a hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, with some characters speaking in the mannered style of old Japan while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

SHADOWS



SO YOU'RE REALLY HEADED BACK...?
MM.
HOW IS KENSUI-DONO?
I HEARD HE COLLAPSED AT THE BANQUET. NOTHING SERIOUS, I HOPE...?
NO. PROBABLY JUST TOO MUCH SAKE.
THE MASTER DOESN'T LOOK IT, BUT HE TURNED SIXTY THIS YEAR.
STILL... IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT, ONLY ME HERE TO SEE YOU OFF.
SHALL I ROUSE THE YOUNG MIS-TRESS...?
NO... IT'S FINE.
THE CEREMONY AND THE BANQUET WERE PROBABLY HARD ON HER. I WANT TO LET HER REST.

NOW THAT THE YOUNG LADY'S YOUR WIFE...
...IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS, I KNOW. BUT... CAN I SAY ONE THING, ANOTSU-SAN...?
THE YOUNG LADY'S REAL JOB ISN'T TO BE YOUR WIFE.
IT'S TO BEAR AND RAISE YOUR CHILDREN.
SHE'S STILL A SAMURAI WOMAN. AT THE CORE, SHE'S A LOT STRONGER THAN YOU THINK.
IT'S NOT FAIR TO TREAT HER AS IF SHE'S... DAMAGED GOODS. IN MY OPINION, IT WILL ONLY MAKE THINGS WORSE.

YES... I SHOULD BE BACK IN ABOUT A FORT-NIGHT.
ANYWAY, COME BACK FOR HER AS SOON AS YOU CAN.
I WON'T FORGET THAT.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

AH...?
MASTER! HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
NO! KOZUE...
GET EVERY-ONE...
IF I RUN, I CAN STILL CATCH UP. I'LL GO AND--
YOU JUST MISSED HIM... HE ONLY LEFT A MINUTE AGO.

GET EVERYONE UP AND INTO THE DŌJŌ.
EVERY-ONE, UNDER-STAND?!
WHOO

IT'S...
KAGA...!
.....?
K...
KAGA...?
.....
.....!
Kuh-
shck
.....
ungh...
IT WAS MOUNT HAKUSAN!
SO...
SO, THIS MOUN-TAIN...

THANK GOD...
THANK G-
.....
.....
.....
IN OTHER WORDS... I JUST USED MY LAST BIT OF STRENGTH TO CLIMB *OVER* MOUNT HAKUSAN, THE ONE ROUTE *EVERYONE* WHO GOES TO KAGA *AVOIDS*.
NO. IT'S OKAY.
JUST FORGET IT. IT'S *OKAY*.
I'M ALMOST *THERE...!*
ONCE I'M OFF THIS MOUN-TAIN...

WHEN I THINK THAT MAN IS OUT THERE, SOME-WHERE IN THIS LAND...!
WHEN I THINK THAT...
HEH HEH HEH...!
DAMN YOU, ANOTSU KAGEHISA! WASH YOUR NECK...
...AND WAIT FOR MY BLADE!

BUT DADDY...
THAT'S ONE OF THE OLDEST TRICKS IN THE BOOK. IGNORE HER!
NO NO TRICK
P- PLEASE SOMEONE
F... FOOD...

WHSSSHH
?!
HELLO...?
UNG...
I'M...
ALIVE?
OH...
I'M...
OKAY?

WELL...? CAN YOU STAND?
AH... .....
→hmf←
AAHH...
NNK!
N-NO..
NO, NO, NO, NO...
NOOOO!

AU!
:habh:
:hoff:
AH...?
YOU?!

YOU'RE SO FILTHY I COULDN'T TELL. ARE YOU REALLY ASANO TAKAYOSHI'S DAUGHTER?!
SNFF SNF?
THAT'S RIGHT!
I AM HER!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I'M LOOKING FOR...
.....
"WHAT AM I"...?! ARE YOU KID-DING?!
YOU! I'M...
.....
.....

Sniff
Wipe

WH-
WHAT
ARE YOU
CRYING
FOR?!
STOP
IT...
STOP
IT!!

REMEMBER THIS, ANOTSU KAGE-HISA!
NOW AND FOREVER, IF I APPEAR BEFORE YOU...
...IT'S BECAUSE I'VE GOT BUSINESS WITH YOU!
YOU GET IT?!
I THINK SO...YOU'RE PLANNING TO STAB ME IN THE BACK?
PLEASE! DON'T INSULT ME.
NO, IN FACT...

WELL...?
HOW'D YOU LIKE TO *USE* ME IN THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*?

I REFUSE.

IT SEEMS YOUR ENERGY BACK, SO I'M LEAVING.
.....
.....

WAIT!
DAMN IT! JUST *HOLD* ON A SEC!!

LISTEN, YOU! I JUST SAID SOMETHING PRETTY DARN *RADICAL* AND *UNEXPECTED*, IF I DO SAY SO *MYSELF!*
AT *VERY* LEAST, ACT *SURPRISED* OR SOMETHING!
WHY? IT WAS TOTALLY PREDICTABLE.

YOU'VE LEARNED ENOUGH ABOUT ME THAT I ASSUMED...
THE NEXT TIME YOU SHOWED UP... YOU WOULDN'T BE RASH ENOUGH TO ATTACK DIRECTLY.
.....!
.....!
I ASSUMED YOU'D TRY SOME SORT OF TRICK.
FOR INSTANCE... PRETENDING TO SWITCH SIDES.
H-HEY! WAIT A--
JUST TYPICAL WOMAN'S THINKING. NO SURPRISE AT ALL.
STILL, IT WAS WISE OF YOU TO LEAVE YOUR SWORD BEHIND.
I'M NOT LYING! IF YOU WANT PROOF...
I LEFT MA- I MEAN, I LEFT MY BODY-GUARD IN EDO!

YOU CROSSED THE MOUNT-AINS? A SINGLE WOMAN, ALONE?
Y... YES.
I'D LIKE TO PRAISE YOUR COURAGE, BUT...
YOU FOOL! YOU WERE COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR DEPTH! NO WONDER YOU ENDED UP BROKE AND STARVING!
YOU SAY YOU WANT TO JOIN THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
THEN LET ME TELL YOU MORE ABOUT US.
THE ITTŌ-RYU IS A SWORD SCHOOL... AND NOT A SWORD SCHOOL. A TRADITION... AND NOT A TRADITION.
WE OFFER NO MEMBER-SHIPS, NO SECRET TECHNIQUE.
IT'S UP TO EACH FIGHTER IF HE WANTS TO BUY IN, OR NOT. QUALIFICATIONS...? ONLY ONE-- THE SWORD!

WE DON'T NEED SWORDSMEN WHO LOSE. AND SO...
YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT YOU DON'T QUALIFY.
THERE. ANY QUES-TIONS?
YEAH! PLENTY!
THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS YOU COULD USE A GIRL.
KUNO-ICHI* WORK, THAT SORT OF THING.
*: A FEMALE SPY, NOT NECESSARILY A FEMALE NINJA.
HOW ABOUT COOK-ING! HEATING THE BATH!
I'LL DO ANY-THING! ANY-THING!
!
YES! YOU JUST NAME IT! BESIDES, THANKS TO YOU...
...I'M LIKE A POOR ORPHANED KITTEN, WANDERING ALONE IN THE WILDER-NESS!
IF YOU CALL YOURSELF A MAN, TAKE RESPONS-IBILITY FOR--
SHUT UP.

HUH ?

.....
GUESS NOT, HUH.
UM... ARE THEY WITH YOU...?
YOU THREATEN ME KNOWING WHO I AM?
I ASK ONCE, FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.
.....
.....
.....
ANOTSU KASEHISA... LEADER OF THE ITTEN-RYU... WE TAKE YOUR LIFE!

ASSAS-SINS...?!
AH-!!
DON'T MOVE! CONTROL YOURSELF!

SHOWING UP HERE WHEN YOU DID...
BAD LUCK FOLLOWS YOU, WOMAN.

BUT I'LL SAY IT AGAIN--IT'S A BLESSING IN DISGUISE YOU CAME UNARMED.

WHETHER YOU'D DRAWN YOUR SWORD AGAINST THESE MEN TO PROVE YOUR WORDS...
...OR JOINED WITH THEM TO TRY AND KILL ME, YOU WOULD HAVE DIED HERE TODAY.

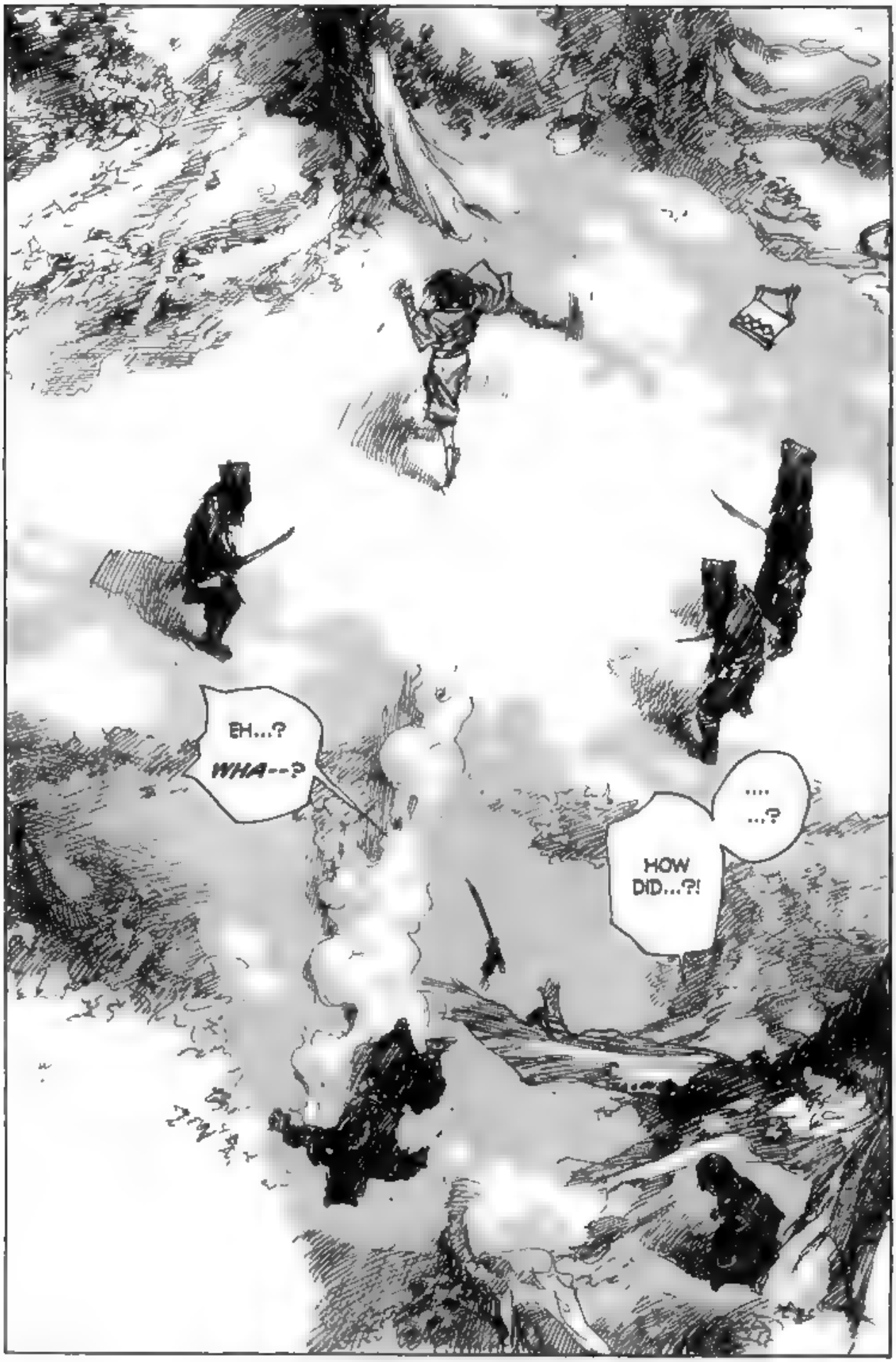
BUT INSTEAD YOU SHALL LIVE... AND LEARN.
GO CURL UP IN THE ROOTS OF A TREE, AND WATCH.

YOU INTERFERE WITH MY GRANDFATHER'S DREAM AND BLOCK MY OWN PATH TO THE FUTURE.
THOSE WHO FACE ME KNOWING THAT NAME...
...TAKE UP *ARMS* AGAINST THE THOUSAND *FOLLOWERS* BOUND TO ME.
VERY WELL. THEN... *YES!*
I AM *ANOTSU KAGEHISA*, HEAD OF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*.

AND SO... FEEL THE WEIGHT OF MY BLADE! SCATTER LIKE LEAVES IN THE WIND!

WH- WHAT SHOULD I DO...?
....?!

MOURNING SHADOWS


EH...?
WHA--?
....
...?
HOW DID...?!

.....?!
AH...
GNNG!
AW, SHIT!
SHIT!
.....
.....
.....
THP
NEXT!
D-DAMN...!
.....
.....
.....
.....

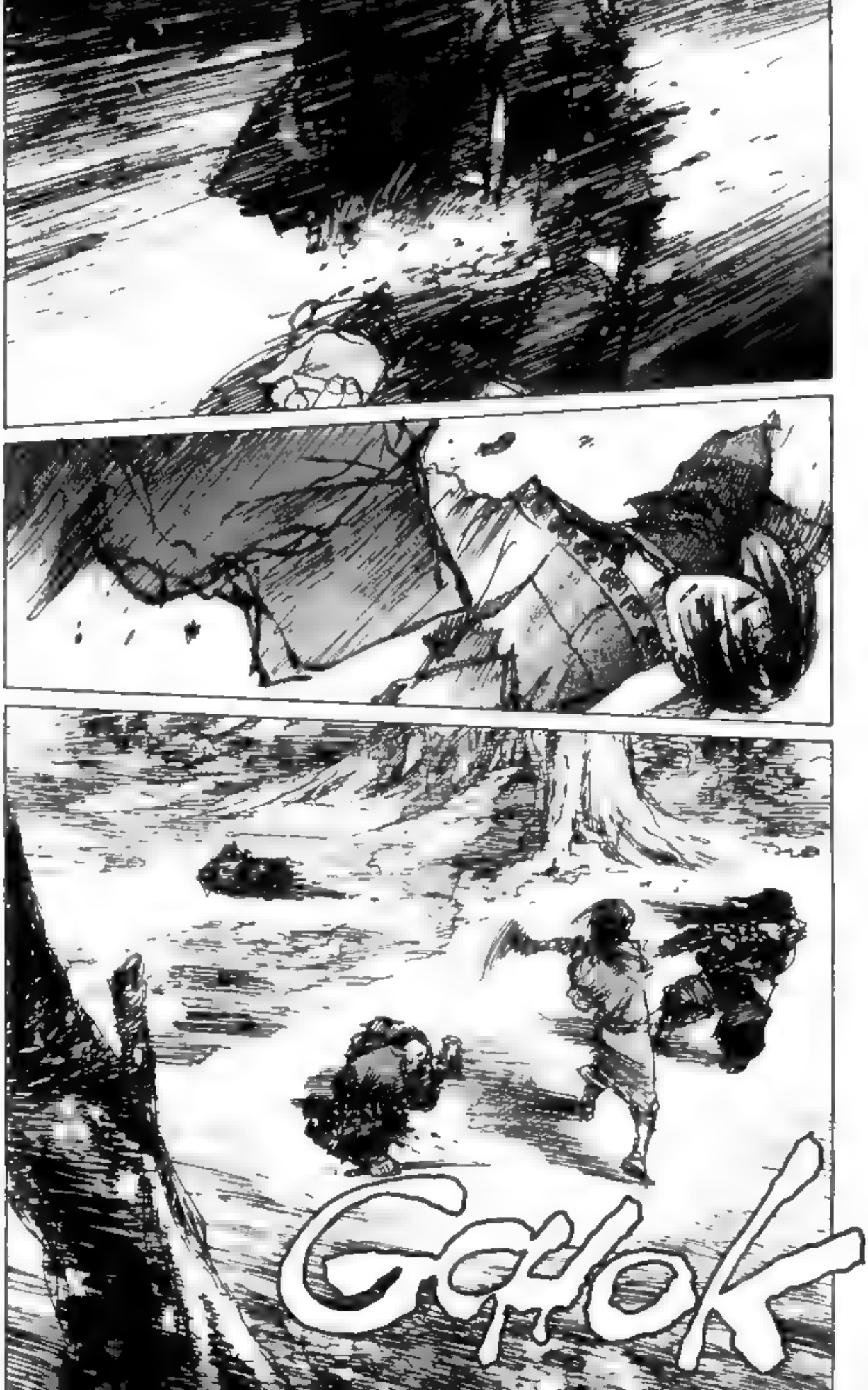
KANG!
RYAN!!

?!?
EH--

¡Ay!

¡Ay!

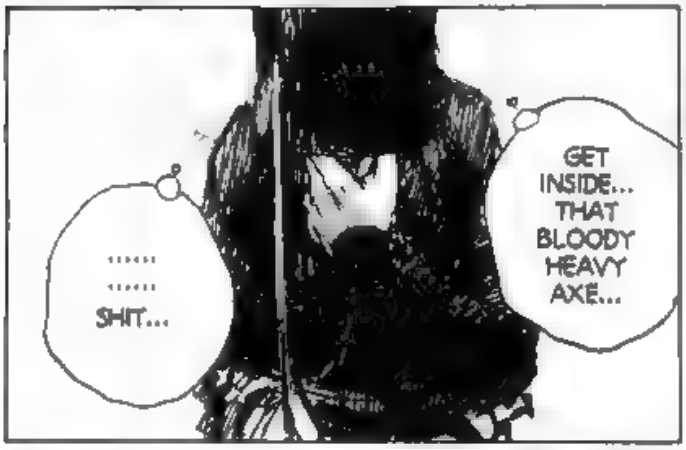
DIEEE
!!
AHH
!?!
.....!
Ooo-
KRNG!

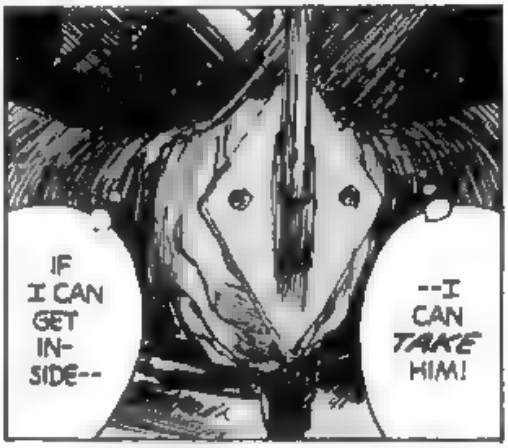

GEKOK

AH...?!
EEEK!
.....
.....
.....!

THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
THOSE MEN WHO KILLED MY FATHER, ASANO TAKAYOSHI, TWO YEARS AGO... AND CRUSHED OUR DŌJŌ. LESS THAN TWENTY OF THEM...
...GIVING ALL WHO STOOD IN THEIR WAY THE SAME, SINGLE CHOICE-- "SUBMIT OR DIE."
JUST TWO YEARS, AND NOW THEIR FOLLOWERS NUMBER MORE THAN A THOUSAND IN EDO ALONE.
VAST, YET ISOLATED. "THE SWORD SCHOOL WITHOUT A STYLE." "THE WILD BERSERKERS."
AND BEFORE MY EYES, THE FOUNDATION AND THE PINNACLE...
...ANOTSU KAGEHISA.

I SAY THIS TO YOU, JUST IN CASE.
IF YOU FLEE, I WON'T PURSUE.

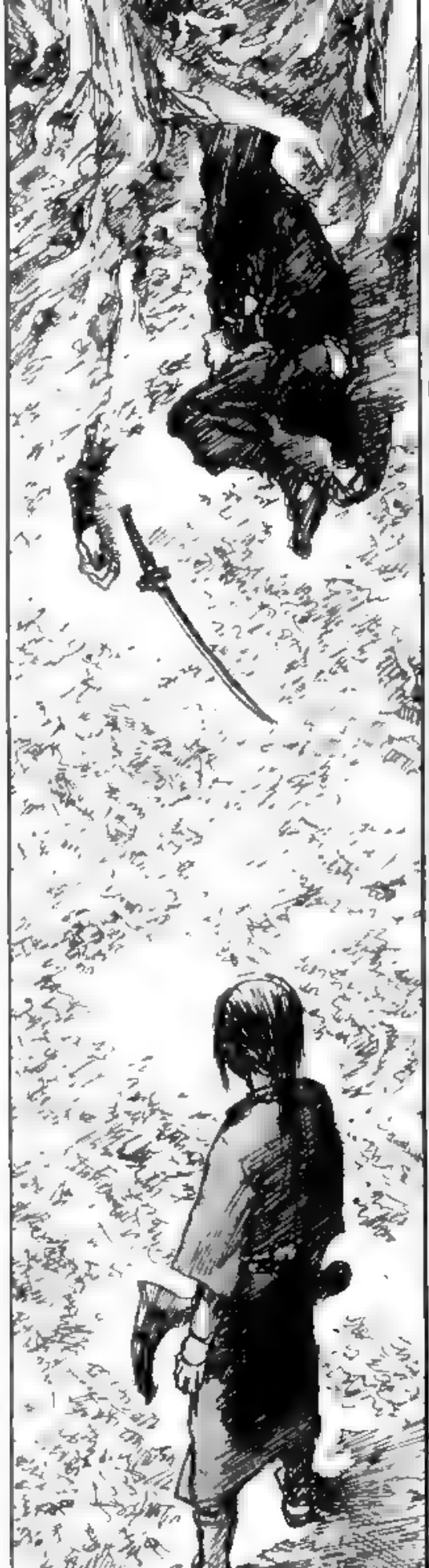

GET INSIDE... THAT BLOODY HEAVY AXE...
SHIT...


IF I CAN GET IN-SIDE--
--I CAN TAKE HIM!

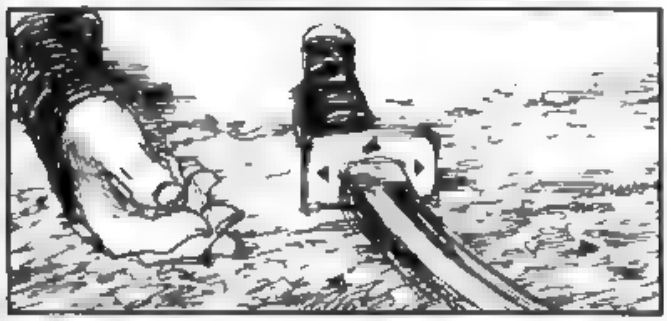
YAAH!
WHSSH
SWISH!
AH--
WHSSH
FOO

.....
.....!
AH...
AH...
HYAA AAAA

.....
.....!
GASP!



NNG...



AAHH!

RYAAAAAAAA!

UNCHOK

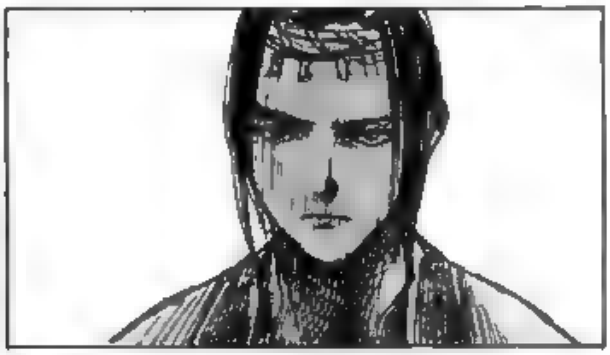
:hmff:
.....
IT'S OVER.
.....
UM...
Y...
YEAH.
!?

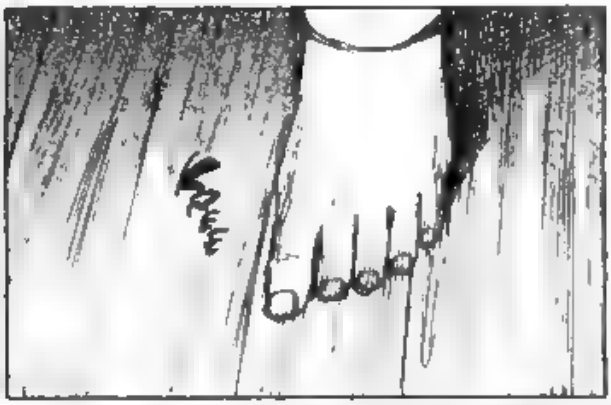
.....!
WHAT TH-?

.....
.....
THIS MAN...
.....
.....
.....?

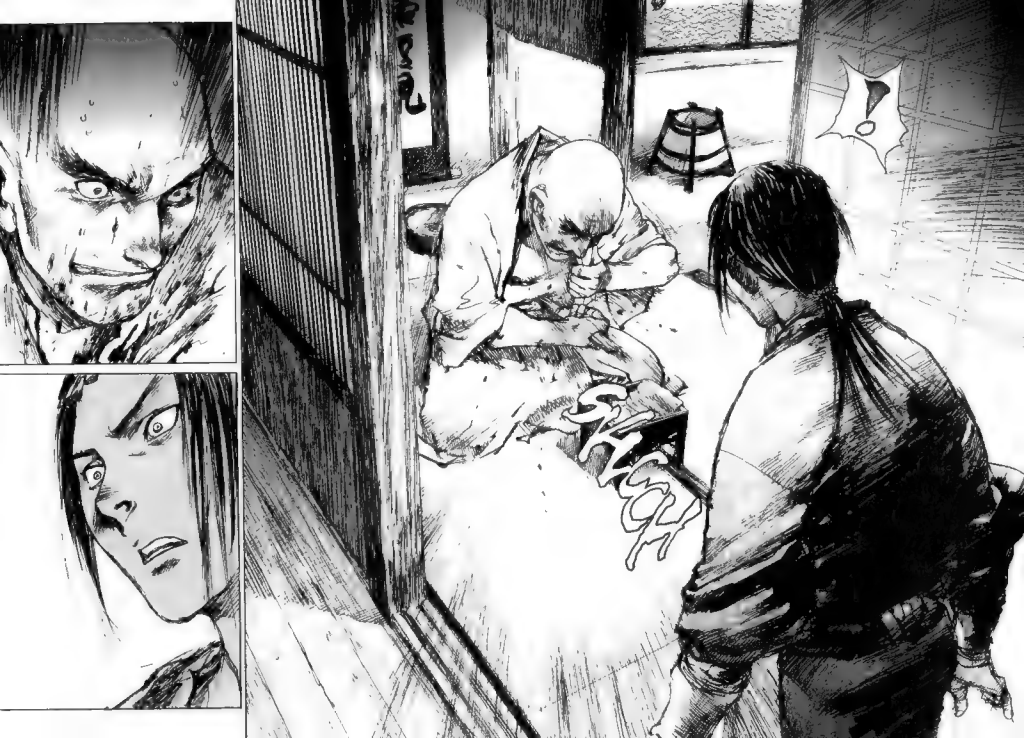
THAP
HEY!! THIS ISN'T FUNNY!
AH?! W--
WAIT! COME BACK! WHAT...
..... EGW

WHERE ARE YOU RUNNING TO?!
TELL ME!!



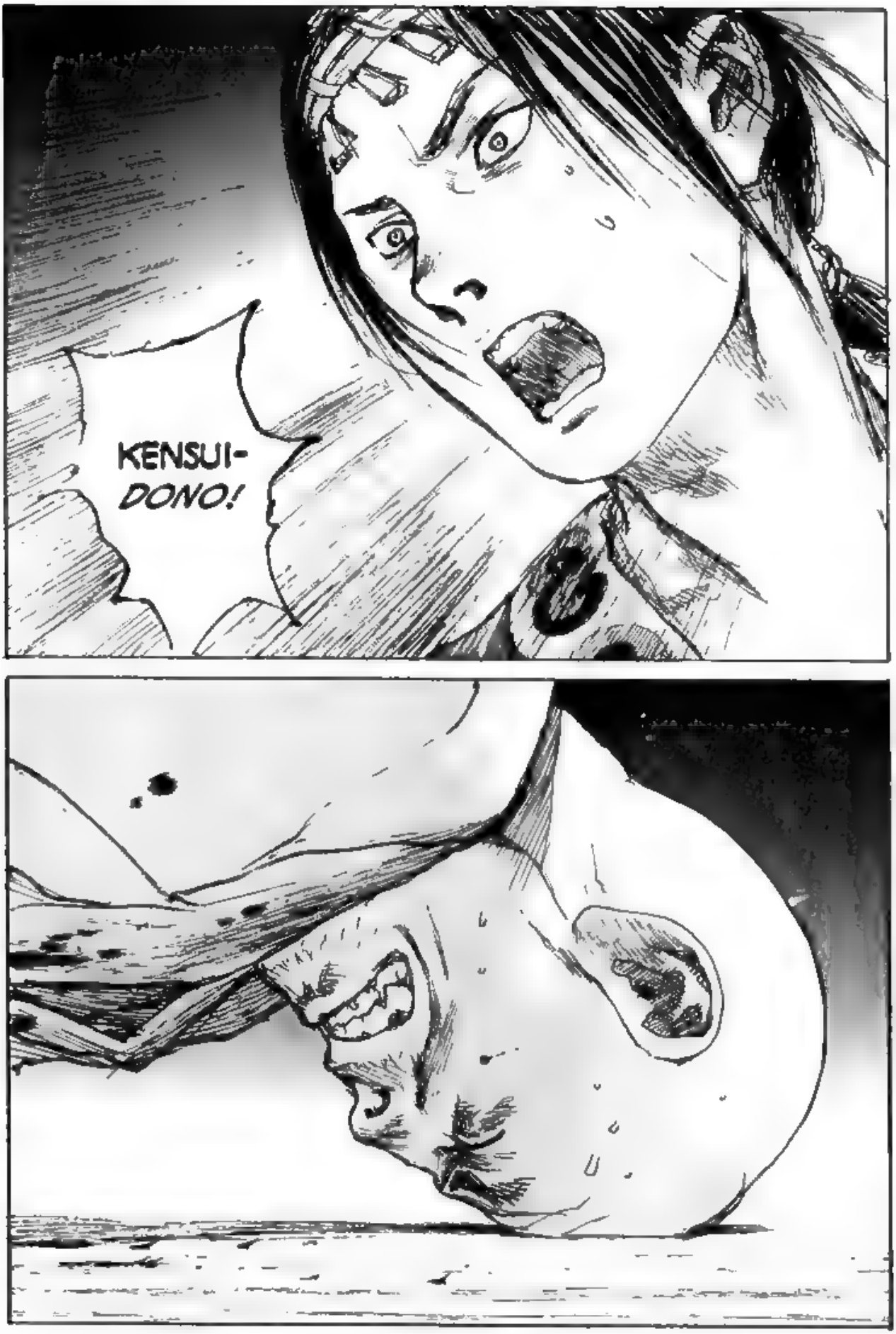


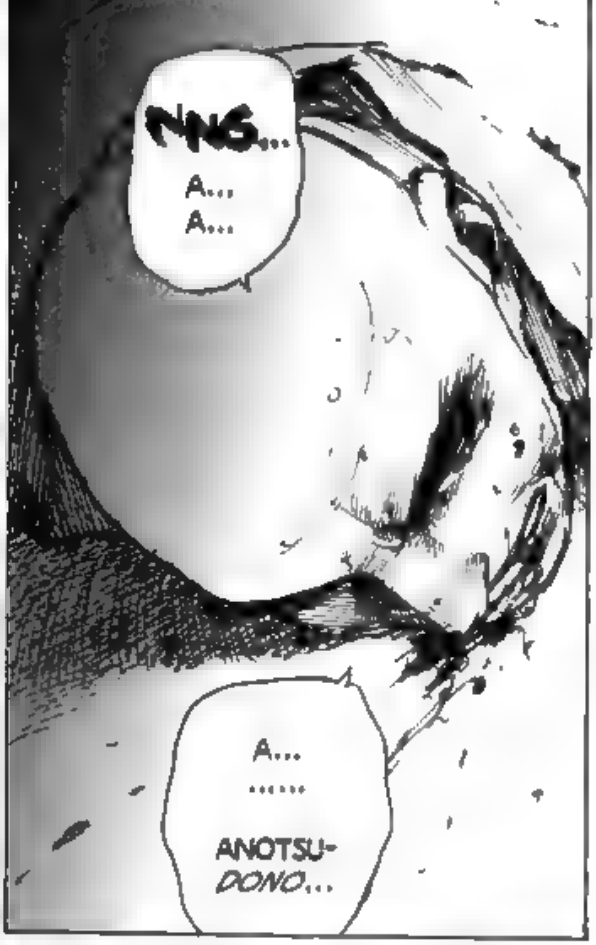
SHAKK


!
SHING

KENSUI-
DONO
!?

PATH OF SHADOWS


KENSUI-
DONO!


NNG...
A...
A...
A...
.....
ANOTSU-
DONO...

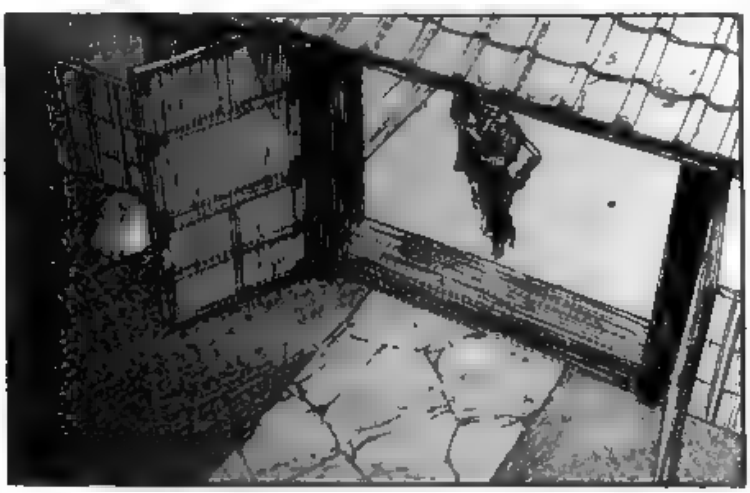
SO...
MY
STUDENTS....
YOU
DEFEATED...
THEM
ALL...?

YES...
I SEE...
.....
N-NO...
IT'S
BETTER
THIS...
WAY...

I AM THE *LEADER* OF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*. I'M USED TO HAVING SWORDS DRAWN AGAINST ME ON THE ROAD.
KENSUI-*DONO*...

MANY OF THE SWORDSMEN WHO'VE HAD THEIR *DOJO* SEIZED BY THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ* REFUSE TO JOIN US.
MANY OF THOSE HAVE GONE TO GROUND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE TO FIGHT US.

BUT THERE IS NO REASON FOR *YOU* TO TAKE MY LIFE.
IF I DON'T GET A CONVINCING EXPLANATION, I WON'T PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR PAIN.



ANOTSU-
DONO...
YESTERDAY, I...
DURING THE WEDDING... YOU SAW ME LEAVE MY SEAT?

YES. I REMEM-BER.
AT... AT THAT TIME...
AN EMISSARY... TOLD ME...

"C... CUT YOUR TIES WITH THE ITTŌ-RYŪ...
"...AND TAKE THEIR LEADER'S... LIFE."
AN EMISSARY... FROM WHO?

.....
.....
TH-
THE
BAKUFU...
.....
.....!
FROM
THE
BAKUFU
?!
GHK
:koff:
:koff:

KENSUI-DONO...!
N-NO... DON'T WORRY.
I WON'T DIE... UNTIL I'M DONE.
ANOTSU-DONO... PATHETIC IT MAY SOUND, BUT...
I HAVE BUT ONE... WEAKNESS. STRIKE AT IT, AND I AM POWERLESS TO RESIST.
THAT WEAKNESS IS--
NO. I CAN GUESS.
ONLY ONE THING COULD TIP THE SCALE...
...FOR ONE WHO TREASURES HIS PROMISES AS MUCH AS YOU.

HISOKA-DONO'S LIFE.
.....
.....
.....
Y-YES...
I WON'T TELL YOU ITS NAME. BUT IF SHE DOESN'T GET A SPECIAL MEDI-CINE...
!!
WHAT HERBS--
N-NOT HERBS. NOT CHINESE. IT'S WESTERN... FORBID-DEN!
I HAD PLANNED... TO TELL YOU LATER.
BUT HER ILLNESS... IT'S FAR WORSE THAN YOU EVEN SUSPECT.
...IN TIME SHE BEGINS TO COUGH UP BLOOD. THEN, IN LESS THAN THREE DAYS, HER BREATH WOULD STOP FOREVER.
IT'S A HARSH DRUG...AND IN T-TIME IT WILL BLIND HER. BUT... HER LIFE C-COMES FIRST...
AND IT'S HER... ONLY HOPE....

"BEFORE... MY OLD MASTER FOUNDED THE *SHINGYŌTŌ-RYŪ*... HE WAS SWORD *SHIHAN* TO THE L-LORD OF MAEDA *HAN*.
"THAT BOND LET US... GET HER DRUGS... DESPITE THE BAN. INDEED, THE DAY Y-YOU ARRRIVED AT OUR *DŌJŌ*... I HAD GONE TO ***COLLECT THEM.***"

BUT... BUT BEFORE AN ORDER OF THE ***BAKUFU***, SUCH BONDS ARE... AS NOTHING. THE EMISSARY TOLD ME...
"KEEP BUYING YOUR DRUGS, OR BE REFUSED THEM HENCEFORTH. ALL HANGS ON YOUR ANSWER!"

.....
.....

LAUGH AT ME... IF YOU WISH.
I NO LONGER UNDERSTAND... ***ANYTHING.***

FOR TWENTY YEARS...
THAT CHILD'S HAPPI-NESS...
THAT'S ALL...
...ALL I THOUGHT OF... ANOTSU-DONO.
HOW COULD IT TURN OUT THIS WAY!
WHERE... WHERE DID I GO WRONG...?!
I UNDER-STAND... NO-THING...
THE ONLY THING I KNOW IS....
I HEARD MY... MASTER'S DYING WISH...
...AND FAILED HIM.

kuff!
kuff!
KENSUI-
DONO...!

A...
ANOTSU-
DONO...
I...
I AM
FINISHED.
I HAVE...
NO MORE
TO SAY.

I DON'T
ASK
FORGIVE-
NESS...
I HAVE NO
RIGHT.
ONLY,
PITY
THIS
FOOLISH
HEART...

AND IF
YOU
UNDER-
STAND,
PLEASE...
BE MY
SECOND.
THIS
SHAMEFUL
CHOICE...
I WAS
FORCED TO
MAKE...

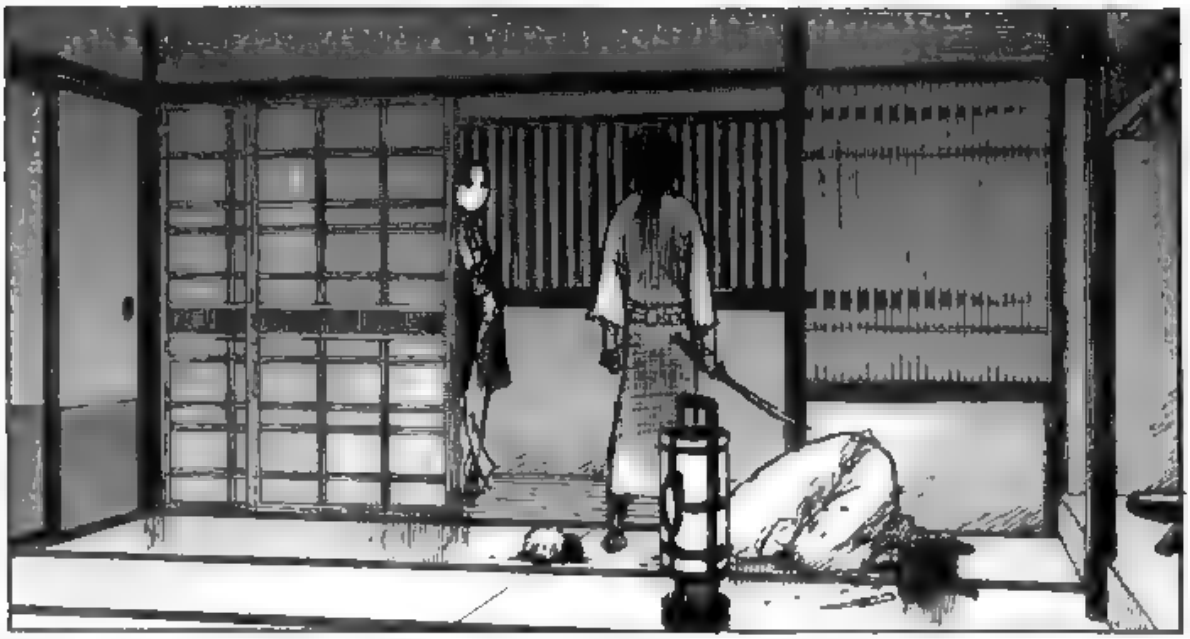
KENSUI-DONO...
.....
.....
.....
NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CARED FOR HER...
...YOU WERE A FOOL TO BETRAY YOUR OWN HONOR.
A WARRIOR CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS. IT'S MAKING THAT CHOICE THAT MEASURES OUR WORTH. IF THE TRUE PATRIOTS OF THIS LAND HEARD YOU WERE A PRISONER OF YOUR FEELINGS...
...THEY WOULD BE STAG-GERED.
.....
.....
.....
AND YET...
WHAT I SEE IN YOU NOW...
...IS WHAT I SAW IN MYSELF, BUT FOUR DAYS PAST.

"MY OWN HONOR I THOUGHT SO UNSHAKEABLE. MY DŌJŌ, MY COMRADES...
"AND THAT DESPICABLE EMOTION, POWERFUL, MATCHLESS, PUSHING ALL ELSE ASIDE."
KENSUI-DONO! TODAY YOU COMMITTED A GRIEVOUS ERROR.
YOU STRAYED FROM THE PATH A SAMURAI SHOULD ALWAYS FOLLOW.
BUT THAT CRIME IS NOT ONE....
...THAT I HAVE ANY RIGHT TO CONDEMN.

KENSUI-
DONO...!
I WILL BE YOUR SECOND.

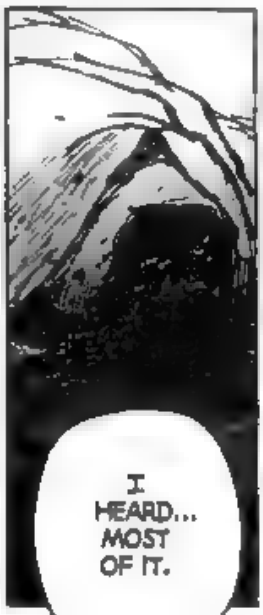
Euuu
HUH...?
I DIDN'T NOTICE...
SOME-BODY ELSE THERE...?

A...
A
WOMAN...?



LET ME EX--

NO. NO...


I HEARD... MOST OF IT.

LISTEN... IT'S A RULE OF THE dōjō. AFTER AFTERNOON PRACTICE AND BEFORE THE EVENING BATH...
...KOZUE ALWAYS REPORTS TO KENSUI ON THE DAY'S PROGRESS.
SO... SOON ENOUGH...
...THIS WILL BE DISCOVER-ED.
AND BEFORE IT IS...
...IT WOULD BE WISE FOR YOU TO BE GONE.
IF YOU USE THE FRONT GATE, THEY'LL TRACK YOU EASILY.
LEAVE FROM THE BACK AND FOLLOW THE RIDGELINE OF THE MOUNTAIN.
.....
MY THANKS.

IF... YOU HEARD...
WHY HELP ME ESCAPE?
KENSUI-DONO'S FEARS FOR YOU.
IF I FLEE...
...THEY ALL COME TO PASS.
KAGE-HISA!
I AM A SAMURAI, AND YOUR WIFE!

WHAT WIFE OF HONOR WOULD NOT SURRENDER *EVERYTHING* FOR HER HUSBAND?

.....
F...
FAREWELL.

??
EH?

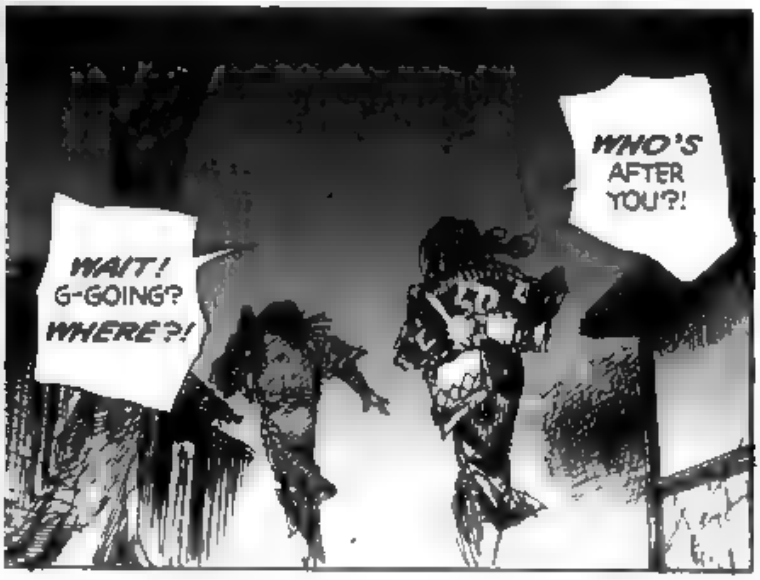
HE'S GONE...
GET A GRIP, YOU IDIOT!
FOLLOW HIM!!
WHERE'S THE BACK GATE
THAP
ULP!

WHATCHA DOIN' HERE?
UH... WELL... ACTUAL-LY...
JUST A SEC
THIS COMPOUND'S BEEN AT FULL ALERT SINCE MORNIN'...!
IF YOU AIN'T GOT A DAMN GOOD ANSWER, YER IN DEEP SHIT.
SO WHATCHA GOT TO SAY, HUH?!
WELL, I... UM... LOOK!
WHOO
GA-!

AH...?!
YOU!
WHY...?

WHAT IN THE WORLD...
..ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

I TOLD YOU, I'M FOLLOW-ING--
THEY'RE AFTER ME. I'M GOING!

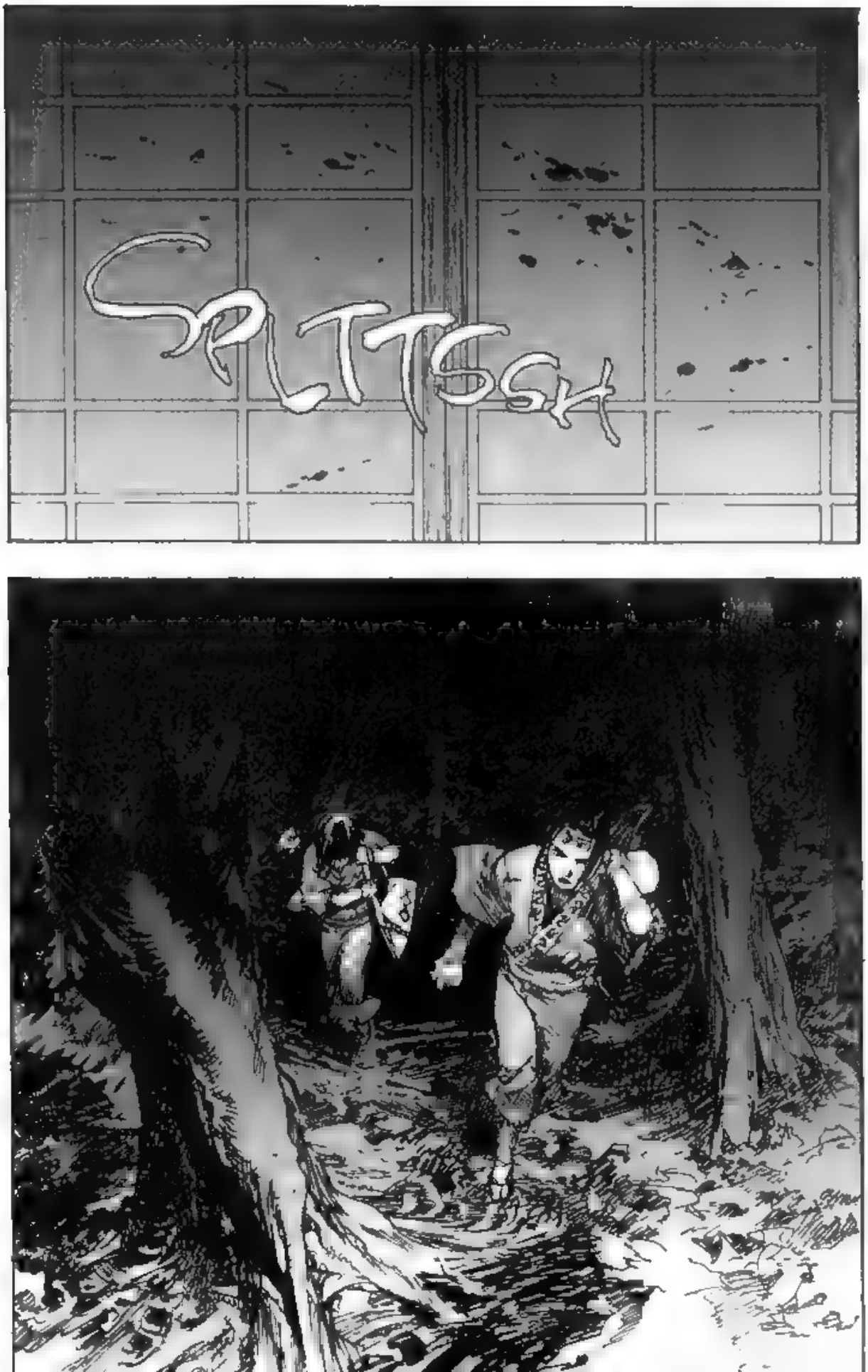

WHO'S AFTER YOU?!
WAIT! G-GOING? WHERE?!

STEP-FATHER... THANK YOU.
THANK YOU FOR A FLEETING MOMENT OF... HAPPINESS.

I WAITED SO LONG FOR THAT MAN TO APPEAR.
SO VERY LONG...
THE MAN WHO COULD LEAD ME...
NO...
...LEAD US FROM THIS DESOLATE MOUNTAIN.
BUT YOU KNOW, FATHER? AT THE SAME TIME, I SOMEHOW KNEW, FROM... OH, I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN...
...THAT IF HE EVER DID APPEAR, HE WOULD JUST BE ANOTHER DREAM.
AND SO... ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
WHY SHOULD HE COME, AFTER TWENTY YEARS...?
FOR TWENTY LONG, LONELY YEARS...

...YOU LIVED IN THESE REMOTE MOUNTAINS, JUST TO KEEP YOUR PROMISE TO MY GRANDFATHER.
AND LOOK AT WHAT BECAME OF YOU... YOU POOR, FOOLISH MAN.
IT'S ALL OF US. TRAPPED HERE BY OATH AND OBLIGATION...
BUT, NO... IT'S NOT JUST YOU.
.....
.....
TO TELL THE TRUTH...
I KNEW IT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. THE ONE WAY...
...THE SIMPLE WAY, TO SET US FREE.

I SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN THIS PATH... LONG AGO.

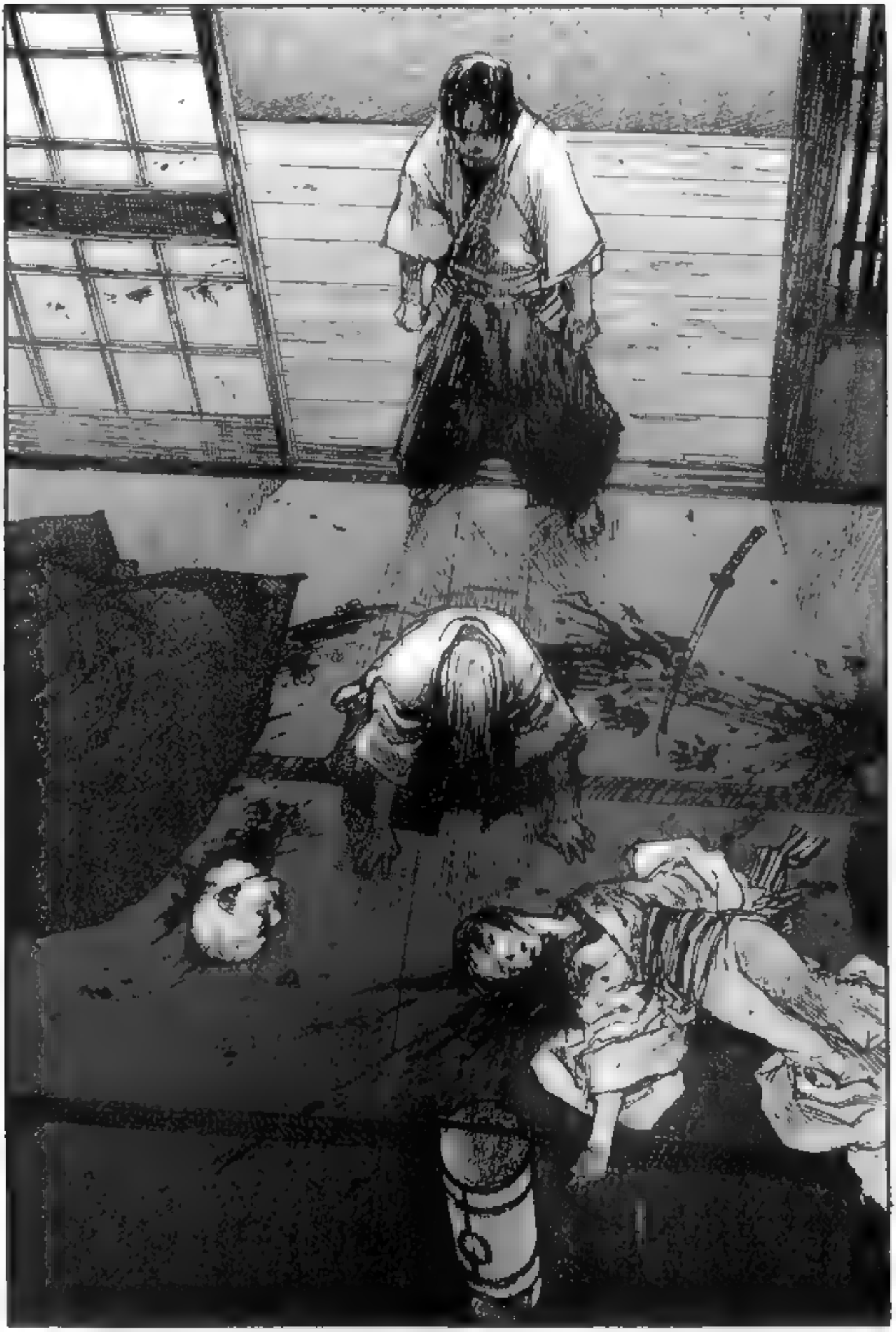

SPLITSK

THORNS

SNAP OUT OF IT, YOU IDIOT!
NNG... ...?
SHIT WHO DUMPED WATER ON ME?!
HEY, GUYS!
WELL? WHAT HAPPENED ...?
BAD NEWS... THEY'RE ALL DEAD. AND HE PULLED OFF MIZUMORI'S HOOD.
HE KNOWS NOW, MAN! HE KNOWS!

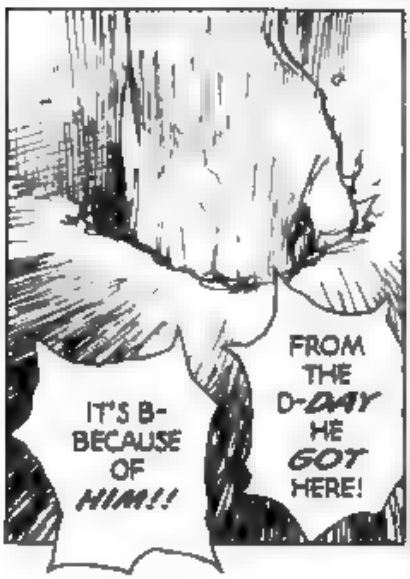
SO MUCH FOR OUR COVER-UP PLANS, HUH?
HEH HEH HEH HEH

IT'S NOT FUNNY!
SHUT UP!!
DAMN, KOZUE... SO WHADDA WE DO? WE--
HUH...? WHERE'D HE GO?



.....
.....
.....

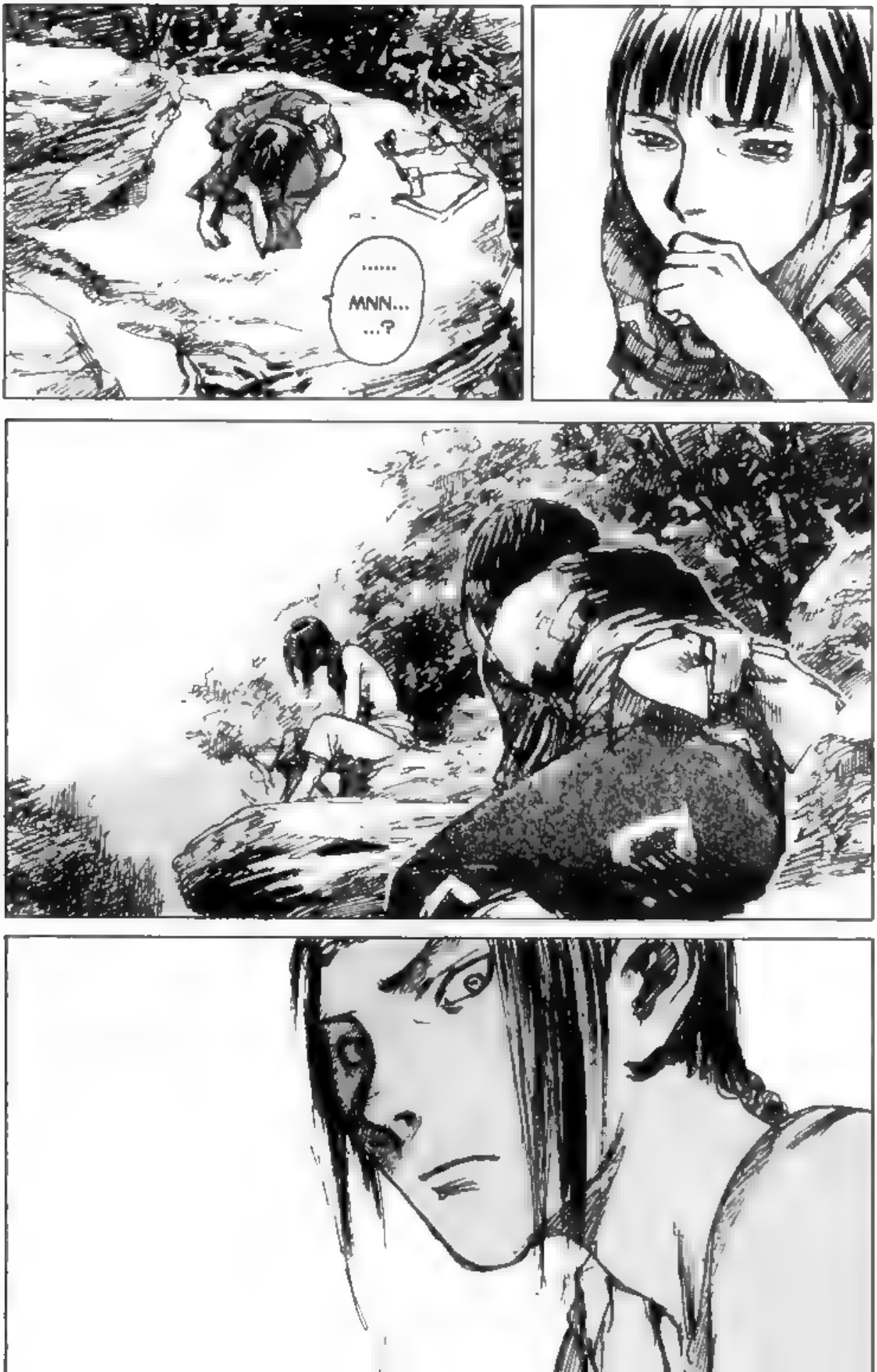
HUH...
H-
HIM!
IRIYA...
.....


IT'S B-
BECAUSE
OF
HIM!!
FROM
THE
D-DAY
HE
GOT
HERE!

EVERY-
THING
WUH-
WENT
TO
SHIT!
HOW C-
COULD...
HOW COULD
THIS H-
HAPPEN...?

AUUGH!
YOU B-
BASTARD!
IF YOU
HADN'T
CUH-
COME...!

ANOTSU
!
KAGE-
HISA!


.....
MNN...
...?

FINALLY AWAKE, HMM?
.....
.....!
N... NOW I REMEMBER...
HERE-- WANT THEM?

I... I DON'T TAKE CHARITY...
AH. I SEE.
WELL, THEY WERE GIVEN TO ME YESTERDAY MORNING.
I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO EAT THEM RIGHT NOW.
BUT THEY'LL GO BAD SOON.
SO IF YOU DON'T WANT THEM EITHER, I'LL TOSS THEM.

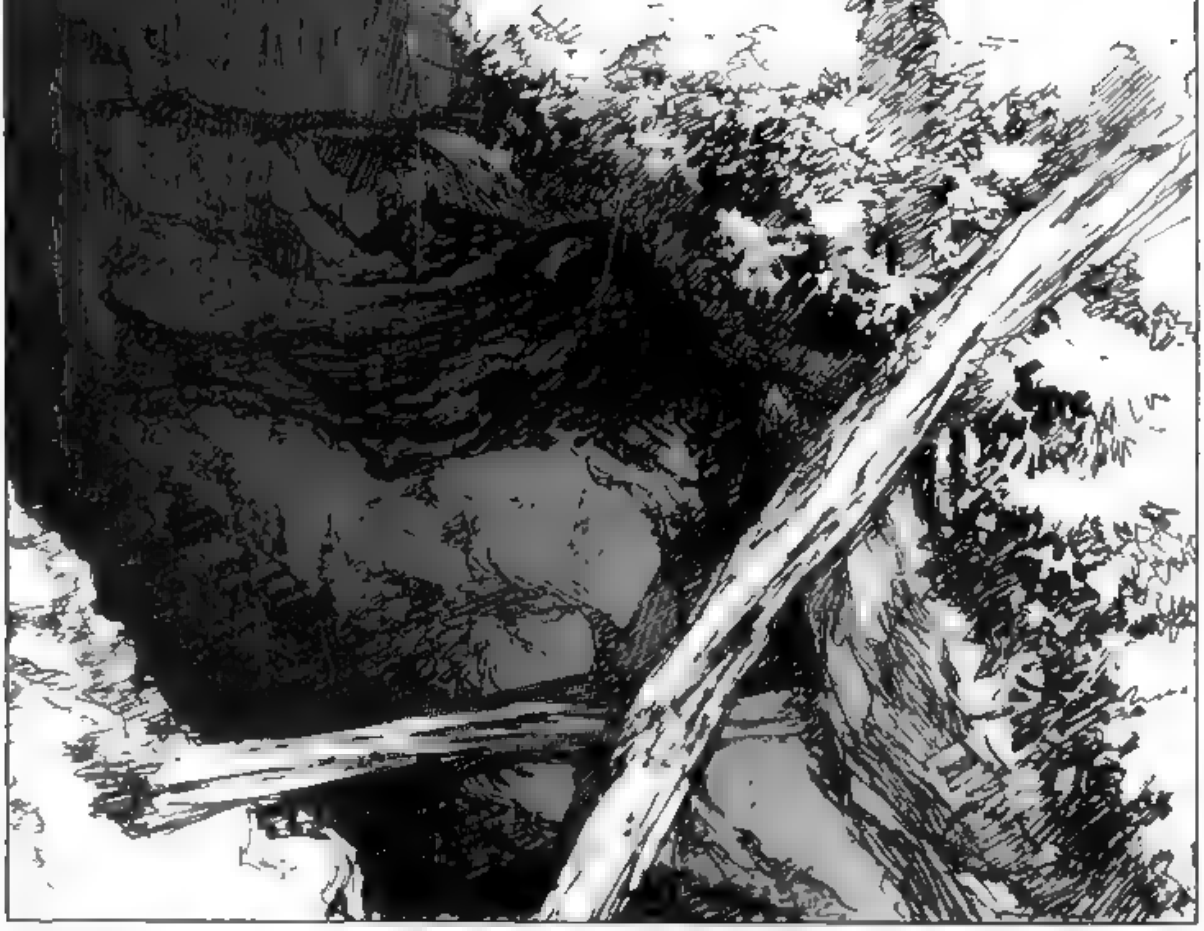
HEY, YOU.
HELP ME WITH THE BANDAGE.
GIVE ME A BREAK!
WHY SHOULD I HELP--
.....
.....

WHAT YOU WERE DOING AT THAT DŌJŌ LAST NIGHT.
ABOUT WHAT?
ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME YOU TOLD ME?
.....
THERE'S NO POINT IN TELLING YOU.
"ITTŌ-RYŪ"...? YOU?
I JOINED YESTER-DAY!
IS YOUR MEMORY SHOT?
LISTEN, GIRL...
I'M ITTŌ-RYŪ, TOO.
MAYBE YOU DON'T THINK SO, BUT I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO KNOW.

...IF YOU JUST WANT TO PRETEND YOU'RE ONE OF US TO KILL ME IN MY SLEEP...
...GIVE IT UP. NOW. I DON'T BLAME YOU, BUT...
...THERE'S NO WAY YOU'RE EVER GOING TO KILL ME.
BESIDES, EFFECTIVE YESTERDAY, I'VE CANCELLED OUR AGREEMENT WITH THE BAKUFU.
I'M A FUGITIVE NOW. STAY WITH ME, AND YOU'RE A TARGET, TOO.
THE FUTURE'S GRIM.
THERE... DONE.
AH. THANKS.

.....
.....
I...I'LL STILL FOLLOW YOU!
YOU'RE OH-SO-CERTAIN I CAN'T KILL YOU, RIGHT...?
SO IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I FOLLOW YOU... YES?
AND IF I'M NOT ONE OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ, YOU CAN'T BOSS ME AROUND, ANYWAY.
SO I CAN DO WHAT-EVER I WANT.

THEY'VE GOT PEOPLE AFTER US. WE CAN'T USE THE MAIN ROADS.
.....
.....
.....
I GATHER YOU CAME OVER MOUNT HAKUSAN WITHOUT RESTING.
AND SOMETIMES THERE WON'T BE ANY ROADS.
IS THAT ACCEPT-ABLE...?
GOOD. BUT IF YOU BURN OUT THIS TIME, I WON'T HELP YOU.
.....
.....
YES.



OH, GOD... I'M SO HUNGRY.
.....
.....
.....

NEVER THOUGHT I'D CLIMB HAKUSAN AGAIN.
MUST'VE WALKED... TEN RI...?
AND ALL I'VE HAD TO EAT SINCE MORNING...
...IS A MOUTHFUL OF THAT DRIED RICE I BOUGHT LAST WEEK.
GREAT...I FINALLY MAKE IT TO KAGA, JUST TO TURN AROUND AND HEAD BACK TO EDO... BROKE, STARVING, AND NOTHING GAINED.
AAAH... WHAT A MESS.
CAN WE REALLY MAKE IT TO EDO...? WELL... HE'LL BE FINE.
BUT ME...
.....

IS HE ASLEEP...?
MM... LOOKS LIKE IT...
YES! HE'S SLEEPING!
HEH HEH HEH..!
HA HA HA HA! YES!!
I'VE WAITED FOR THIS CHANCE...!

EVEN THE BEST KENSHI...
...HAS HIS GUARD DOWN ONE TIME A DAY...
HEH, HEH... DIE!
STOP.

THAT "GOLDEN WASPS" TRICK OF YOURS... IT HAS A SERIOUS DEFECT.
IT WILL ALMOST *NEVER* KILL SWIFTLY.
AND SO... IF YOUR OPPONENT IS ANY GOOD AT ALL...
...YOUR HEAD WILL BE FLYING FROM YOUR SHOULDERS BEFORE YOU CAN EVEN TURN TO FLEE.
IT HAS SOME MERIT...
...BUT *ONLY* IF YOU HAVE AN ACCOMPLISHED SWORDSMAN BACKING YOU UP.
IF YOU'RE A *KENSHI*, KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS *AND* YOUR WEAKNESSES!

.....
.....
TELL ME...
...WHY DO YOU WISH TO BE A KENSHI?
WHY...?!
WHY ELSE?!
TO KILL YOU!

DON'T ACT STUPID!!
SO YOU KILL ME. AND THEN WHAT?
THEN I'LL... REBUILD OUR clan...
...AND. AND... .....
I SEE... .....
WHAT-EVER. IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER.
JUST DON'T OVERDO IT.
GO TOO FAR... IN ANY-THING...
...AND IT WILL ECHO DOWN THE GENERA-TIONS.
SOMEDAY-- IF YOU SURVIVE-- YOU'LL MARRY. LEAVE CHILDREN.

EVEN IF YOU DON'T INTEND TO DO SO.
NEVER GIVE THEM REASON TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS, SEEKING FOR RETRIBUTION.
FOR FAME. FOR DUTY. TO PROTECT THEIR SCHOOLS.
OUR PREDECESSORS CREATED THIS WORLD OF "HONOR" WE LIVE IN.
IRRESPONSI-BLE! INTOLERA-BLE!
BUT LEAVING BEHIND A CYCLE OF REVENGE FOR THEIR DESCEND-ANTS TO TAKE CARE OF...?!
DO YOU UNDER-STAND?

No! I DON'T!
YOU MADE ME CHOOSE THIS PATH! YOU!
I'M NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO YOUR EXCUSES NOW!
.....
.....
.....
WHY...?
WHY DID YOU HAVE TO KILL M...MY MOTHER AND FATHER?
IF IT WASN'T FOR...THAT, I MIGHT BE ABLE...
...TO UNDER-STAND YOU... JUST A BIT...

GIRL... I DID YOU...
...GREAT HARM.
WH... WHAT...?
WHAT DID YOU SAY?!
YOU BASTARD...!
ANOTSU KAGEHISA...

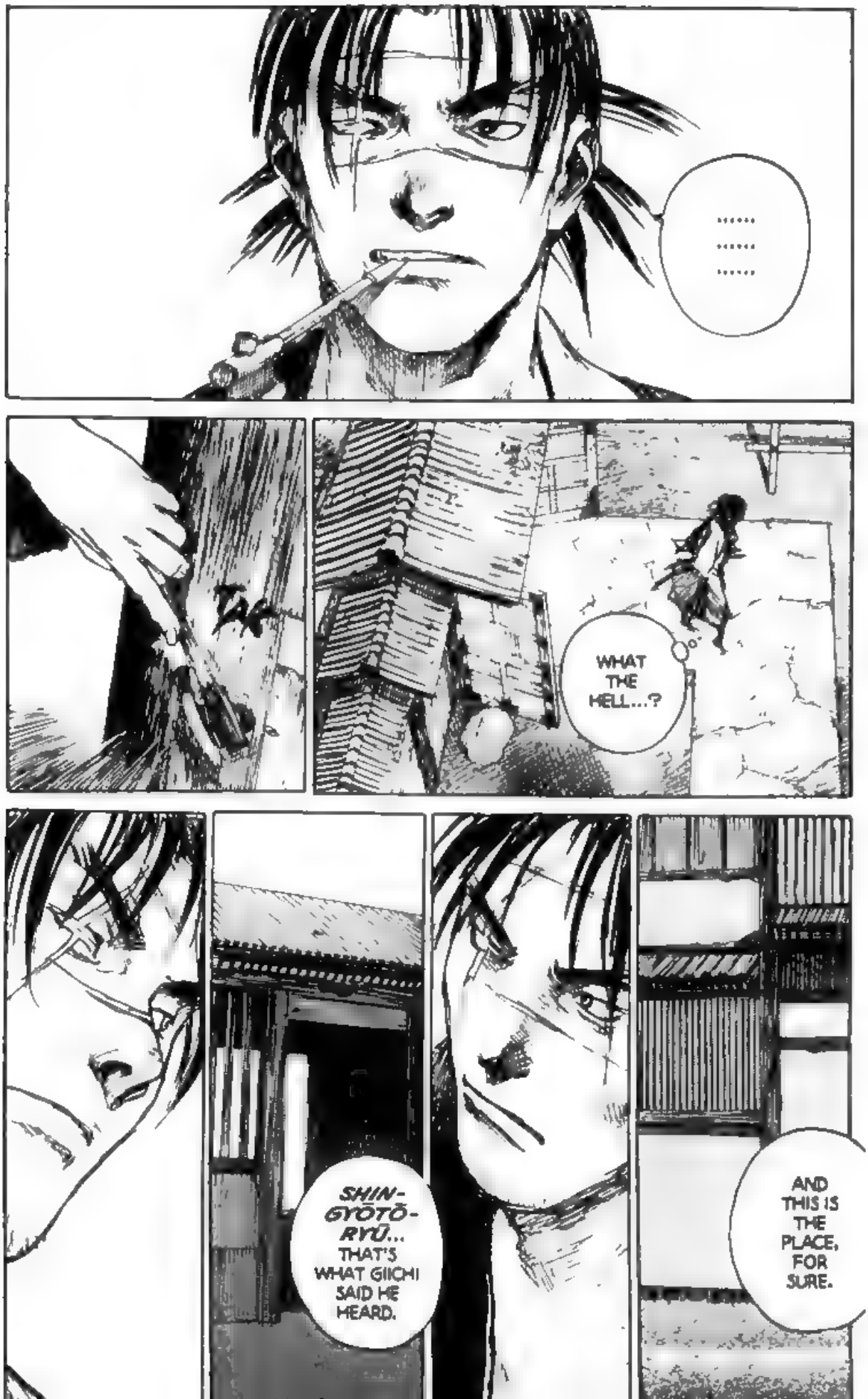
KLDD

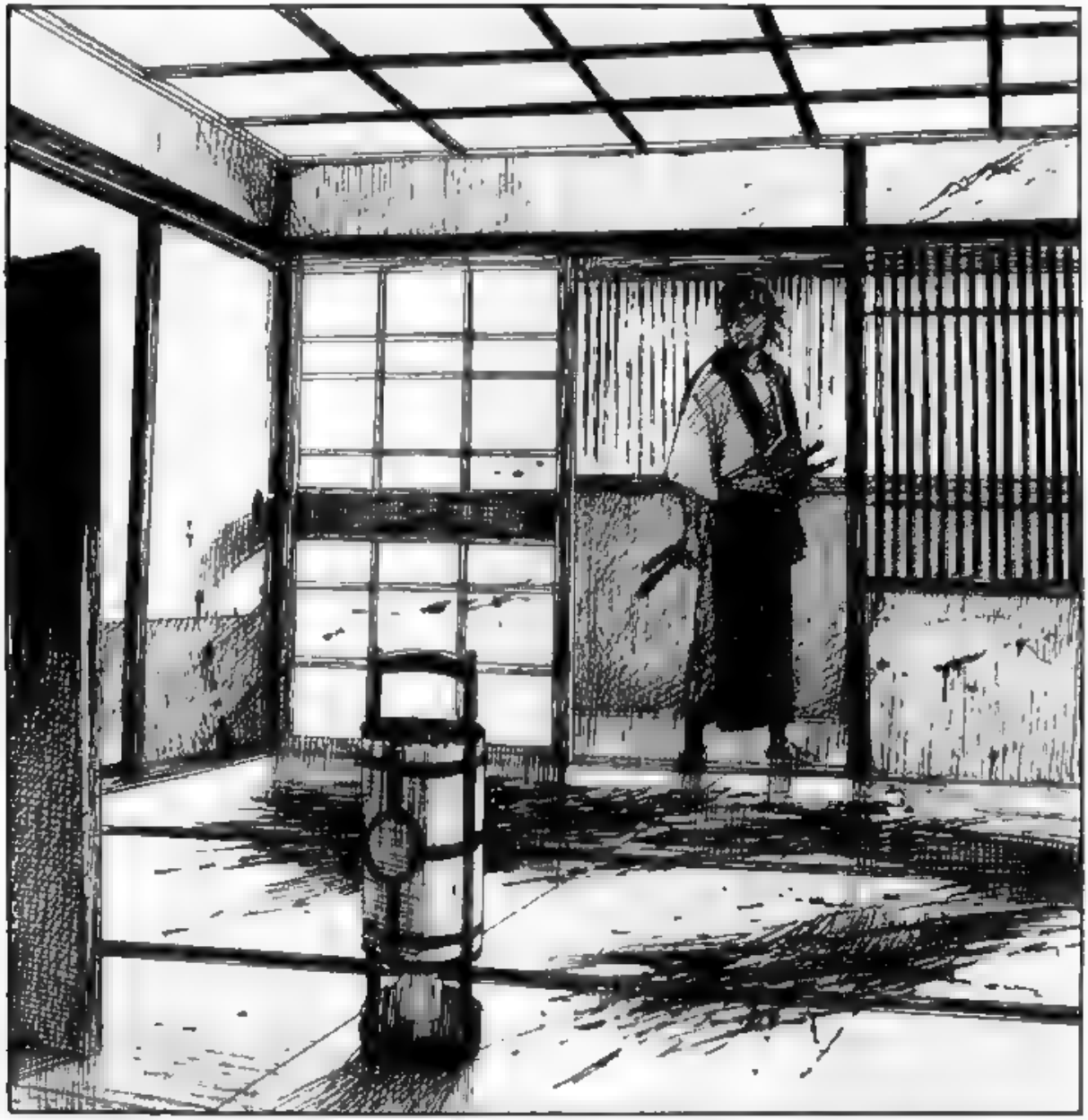
IF YOU TRULY FEEL YOU SHOULD APOLOGIZE--
DON'T MOCK ME!!
--THEN YOU NEVER WOULD HAVE DONE WHAT YOU DID!!
SMACK

WE NEED TO CREST HAKUSAN AND REACH SHIRAKAWA BY TOMORROW NIGHT.
WE'LL LEAVE WHEN THE RAIN LIFTS.
IF YOU'VE GOTTEN EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM... THEN SLEEP.

MIRROR OF THE SOUL
Part 1

YO!
ANYBODY
HERE?!


.....
.....
.....
TAK
WHAT THE HELL...?
SHIN-GYŌTŌ-RYŪ... THAT'S WHAT GIICHI SAID HE HEARD.
AND THIS IS THE PLACE, FOR SURE.

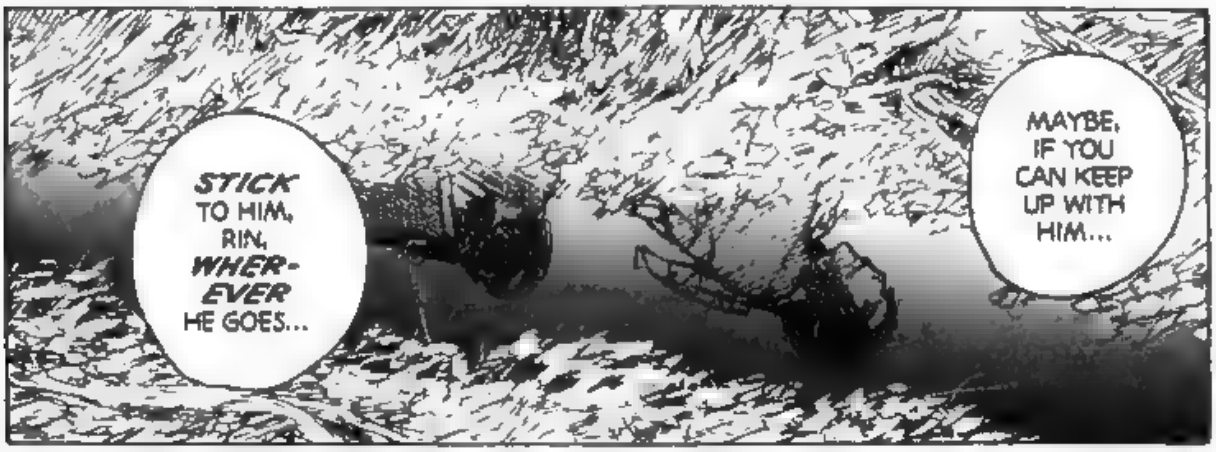


SO...WHAT THE HELL IS *THIS*?
NO *RIN*...
NO *ANOTSU*...
SHIT, NOBODY AT *ALL!*
HEY!
WHAT ARE *YOU* PUFFING AWAY FOR?! GET OFF YOUR BUTTS!
WE'RE HITTING THE ROAD!
AW, MAN... HAVE A *HEART*, BOSS. WE JUST *GOT* YOU HERE!

LET'S SEE... WE'LL HIT KANAZAWA, HOOF IT UP KURIKARA PASS AND THEN...
YOU LAZY SLUGS! YOU CHARGE ME AN ARM AND A LEG, AND YOU GOT THE NERVE TO WHINE?!
CAN'T WE TAKE A--

GOD... I FEEL SO AWK-WARD...
AND FURIOUS...!

ONLY... FURIOUS AT WHAT?
AT MYSELF, FOR FEELING AWKWARD AROUND HIM?


STICK TO HIM, RIN, WHER-EVER HE GOES...
MAYBE, IF YOU CAN KEEP UP WITH HIM...

...YOU'LL GET YOUR CHANCE TO TAKE HIM OUT.
HOLD ON!

WHAT? WORN OUT ALREADY?
VERY FUNNY!
LIKE YOU SHOULD TALK!
I JUST THOUGHT I'D MENTION SOME-THING.
I NOTICED WAY BACK, BEFORE WE STARTED, BUT...
...YOU'RE REALLY NOT LOOKING VERY WELL.

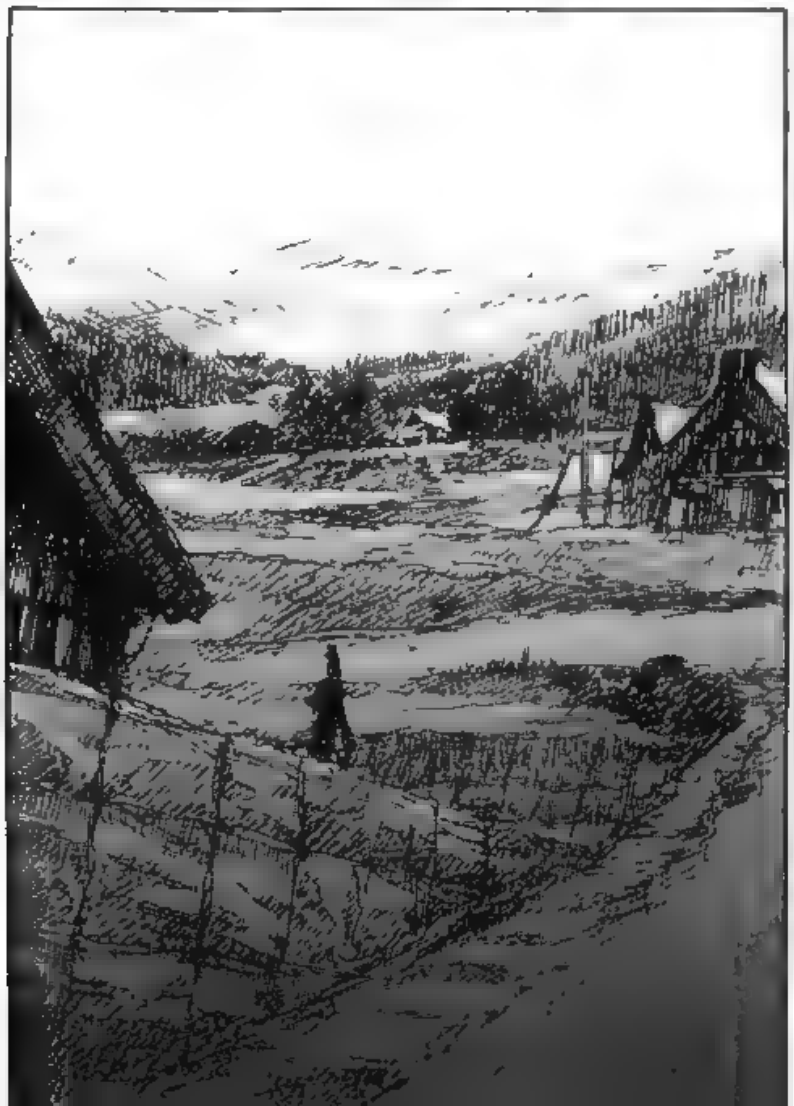
YOU THINK SO...?
YOU'RE WRONG.
OH, AM I...?
LIE TO ME, WILL YOU...? AS IF YOU DON'T KNOW IT, TOO...
MAYBE I HIT HIM TOO HARD...?
SHIRAKAWA VILLAGE
THAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT...

THEY'RE BURNING THE SUMMER FALLOW...
NEVER SAW THAT BEFORE

WANT TO REST A MINUTE? WATCH A BIT...
SAY YES! DEAR GOD, SAY YES!
I CAN'T TAKE ANY-MORE...!
HERE.
.....
.....!
I HAVE SOME... BUSINESS... IN TOWN.
YOU WON'T FIND ANY FANCY TEA HOUSES HERE...
...SO JUST BUY SOME DRIED SWEET POTATO FROM A FARMER.
YOU'RE... NOT JUST GETTING ME...
...OUT OF THE WAY SO YOU CAN TAKE OFF...?

I DOUBT THEY'VE FOLLOWED US. BUT YOU MUST FEEL UNEASY WITHOUT A SWORD.
HERE. TAKE THIS, TOO.
NO. LATER.
AH?! BUT... WAI-
B-BUT... .....?

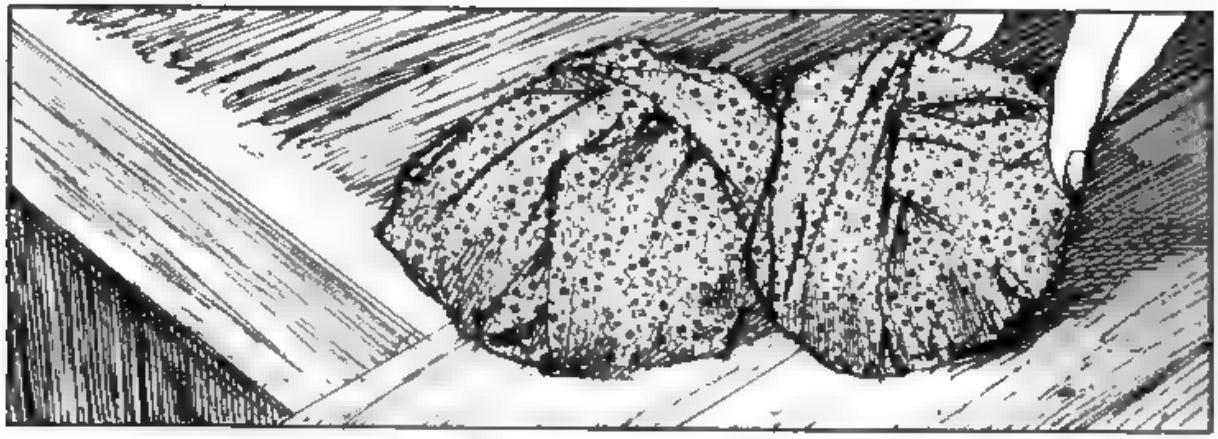
AYE...



KNOCK KNOCK
YES...?
DO YOU WANT A MINOGO ...?
OR... ....
IT'S ANOTSU KAGEHISA.
I... HEARD YOU WERE HERE.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
YOU LOOK... THINNER.

YOU, TOO...
DO I? NO...
JUST... TIRED FROM THE ROAD.
OH... BEFORE I FORGET.
THERE'S SOMETHING I MEANT TO GIVE YOU, IF I EVER SAW YOU AGAIN.
.... WELL.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME IN? REST A LITTLE?



.....?
WHAT'S *THIS*?

MONEY. FOR WHEN YOU PAID OFF MY BROTHEL CONTRACT.
IT'S THE REMAINING BALANCE THAT I OWE YOU.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A LIVING?

THIS IS A TINY VALLEY, AS YOU CAN SEE.
THE VILLAGERS TILL A LITTLE LAND, THEY RAISE SOME SILKWORMS... BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH TO LIVE ON.
IT'S *FREIGHT* THAT KEEPS THEM GOING.
RUNNERS AND BEARERS-- *DOSHIMA* AND *BOKKA*, THEY CALL THEM-- CARRY CARGO BETWEEN TOYAMA AND GUJO.
I WEAVE A KIND OF PADDED RAIN CLOAK THEY USE, CALLED *MINOGO*.
AND THEY BUY THEM FROM ME. AND I SURVIVE.
AND... WHAT *ELSE*?

YOU COULDN'T SAVE ALL THIS...
...WITH HANDI-CRAFTS. STOP *LYING*. *TELL* ME THE TRUTH.
.....
.....
.....
WHEN THE BEARERS AND FARMERS COME FOR THEIR... *MINOGO*...
I TAKE THEIR MONEY. AND THEN... I *SELL* MY *BODY*.
SATISFIED? DO YOU WANT *DETAILS*...?

HOW COULD YOU?!
KAGEHISA, DON'T...!

I AM NOT...
...AS WEAK OR TRAGIC A WOMAN AS YOU THINK.

I SIMPLY FOUND A WAY TO SURVIVE WITHOUT DEPENDING ON ANYONE ELSE.
I GAVE MYSELF TO IT... GLADLY.

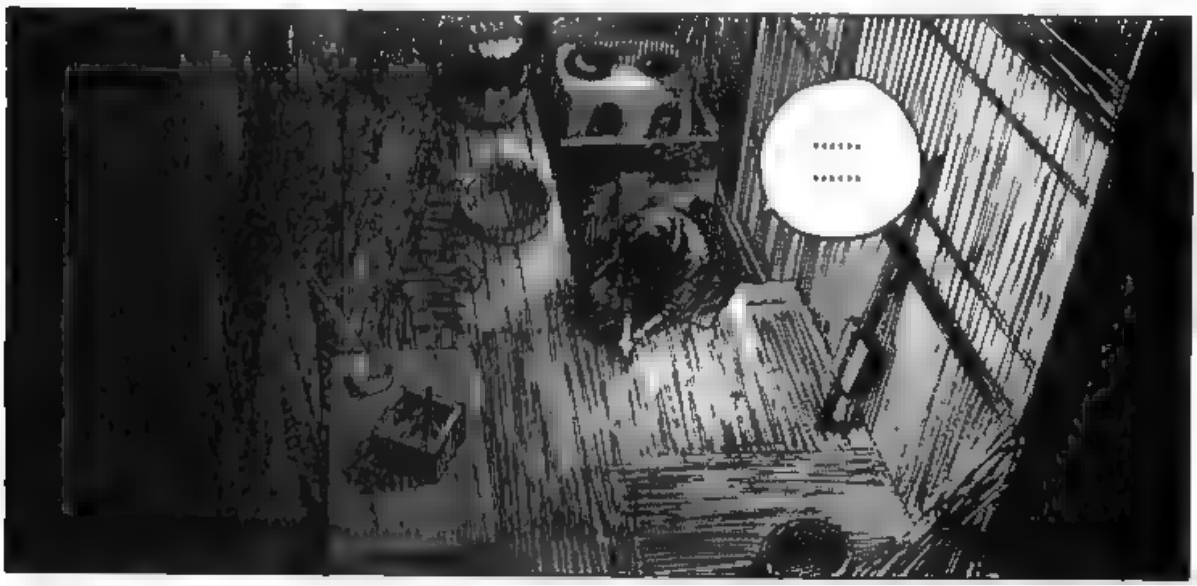
IF I CAN LIVE QUIETLY IN THIS VILLAGE, WORKING DAY BY DAY TO FEED MYSELF...
...LEAVING NO MARK ON ANYONE'S LIFE...

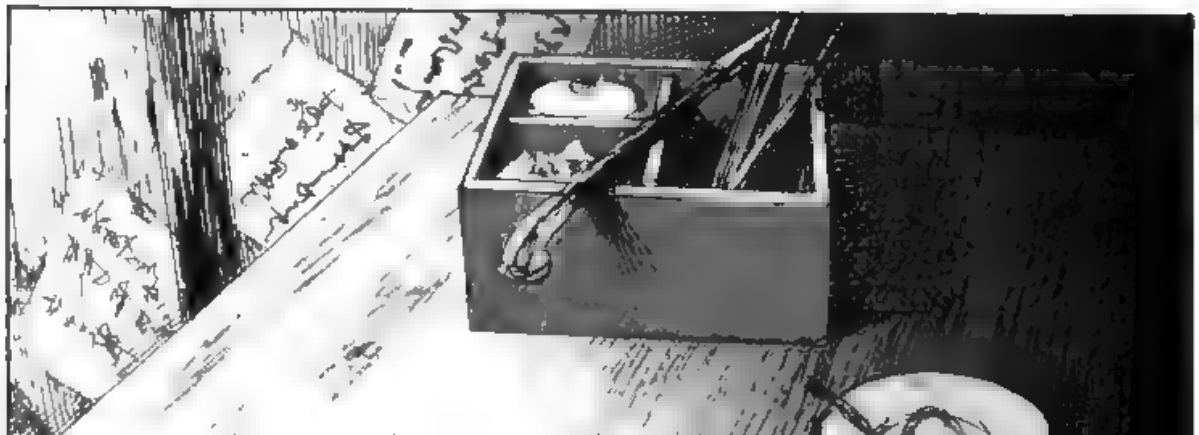
THEN... THAT'S ALL I NEED.
OH...
I TRIED HELPING WITH CLEARING THE FIELDS, BUT I WAS CLUMSY. I GOT BURNED...
YOUR HAND...?

THEN TAKE THIS. FOR A DOCTOR.
.....
.....
.....
I STILL WANT YOU BACK IN THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*. THAT HASN'T CHANGED.
I'LL SAY NO MORE.
BUT... AT VERY LEAST, TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH.
SAYONARA, MAKIE.

KAGE-
HISA-
SAMA!

I... HOW... UM...
H-HOW HAVE YOU BEEN? ANYTHING NEW?
NOT MUCH.
NO, WAIT.
ACTUALLY, I JUST TOOK A WIFE.
.....
.....
OH...

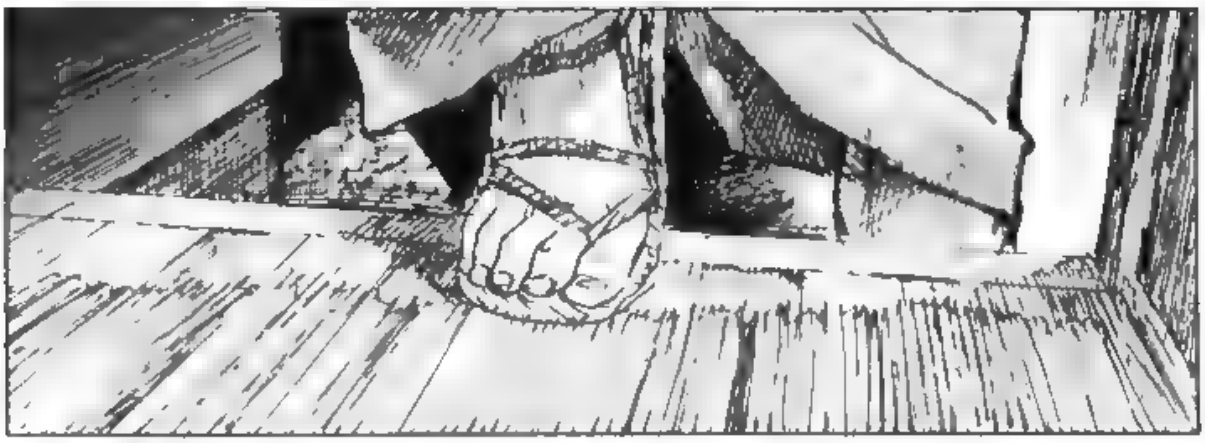




NNG...!
SHACK

MAKIE...!

MIRROR OF THE SOUL
Part 2



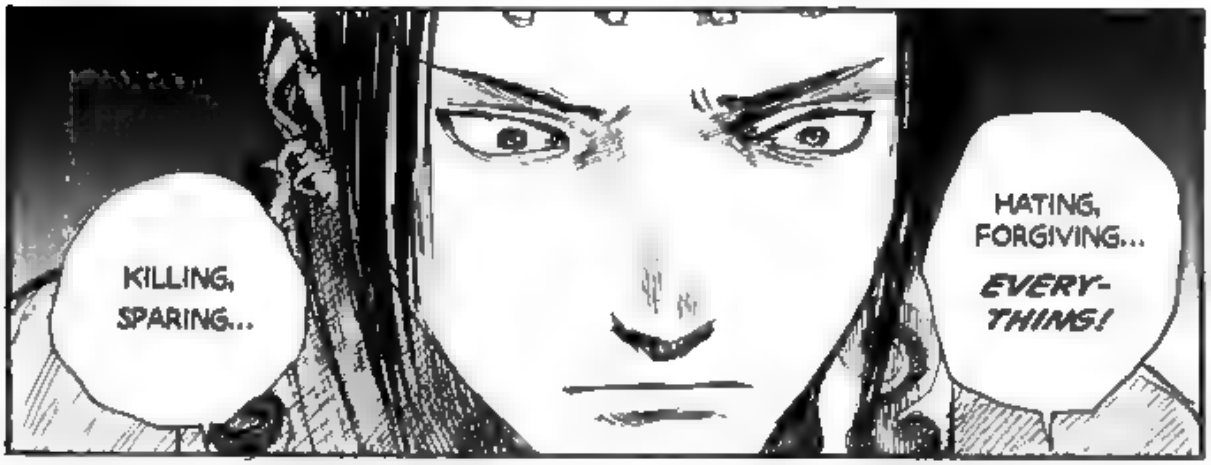
THAP

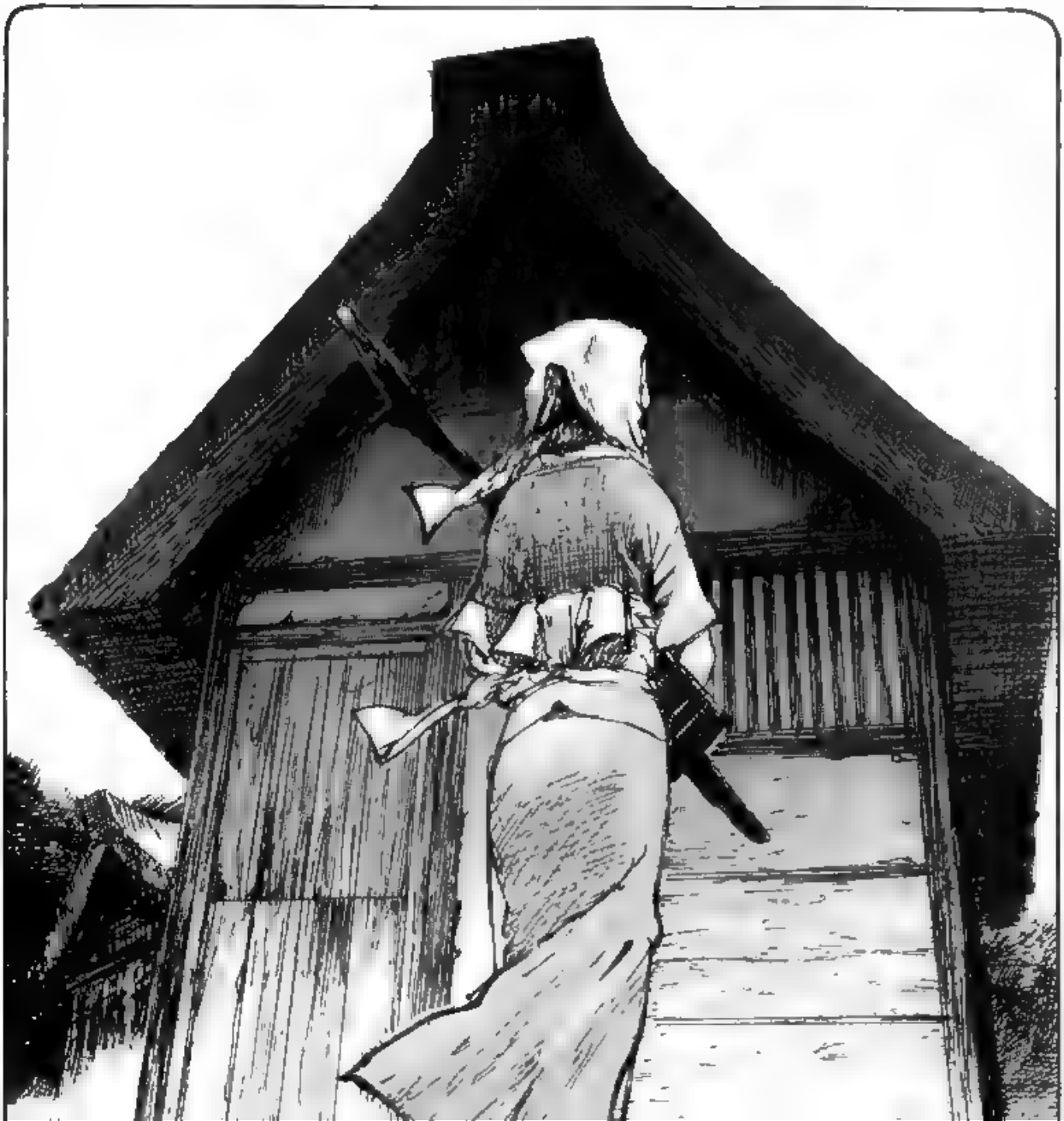
.....
.....
.....!

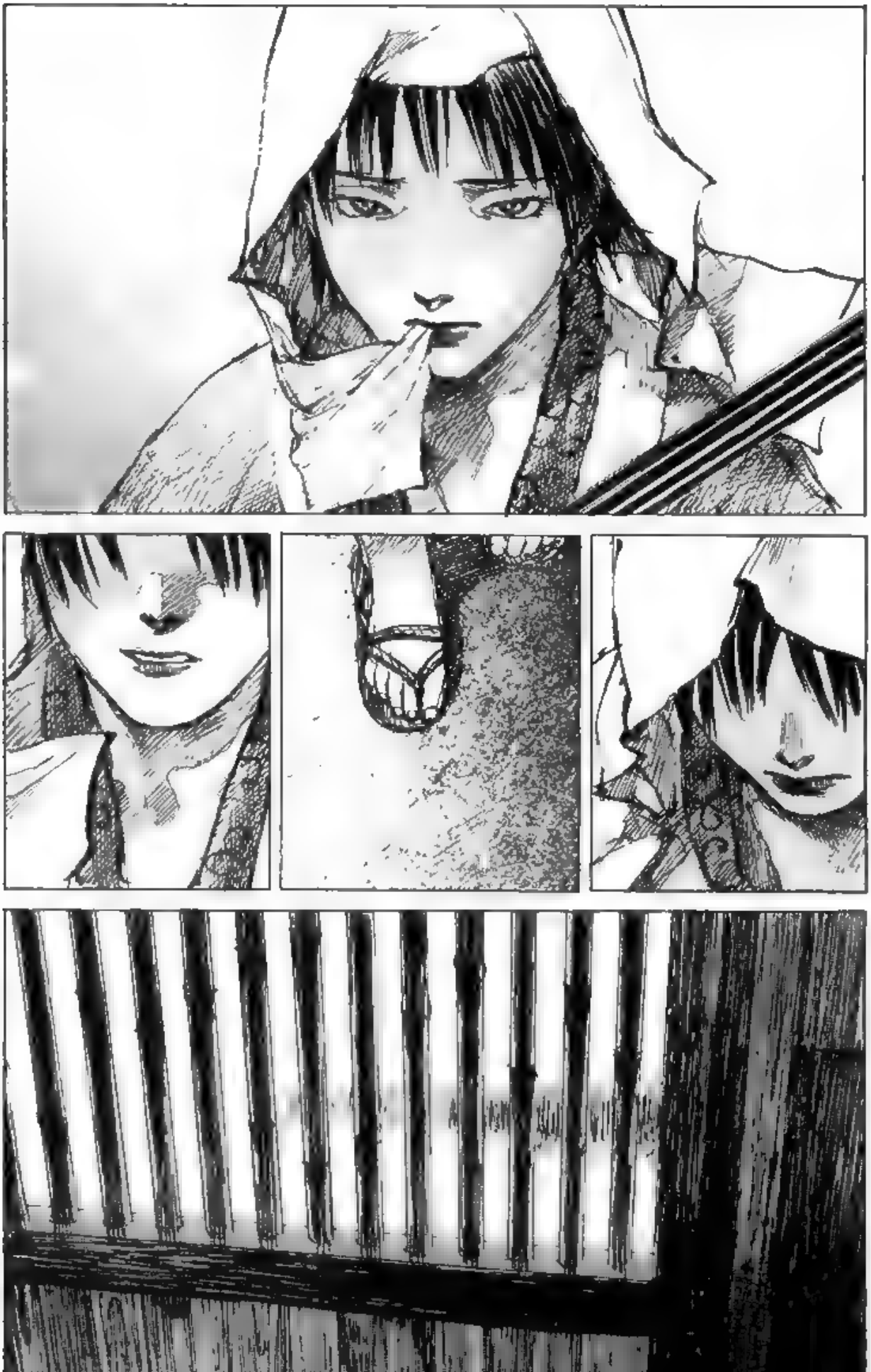
KTAK
AH!
IT--
IT...
HURTS...

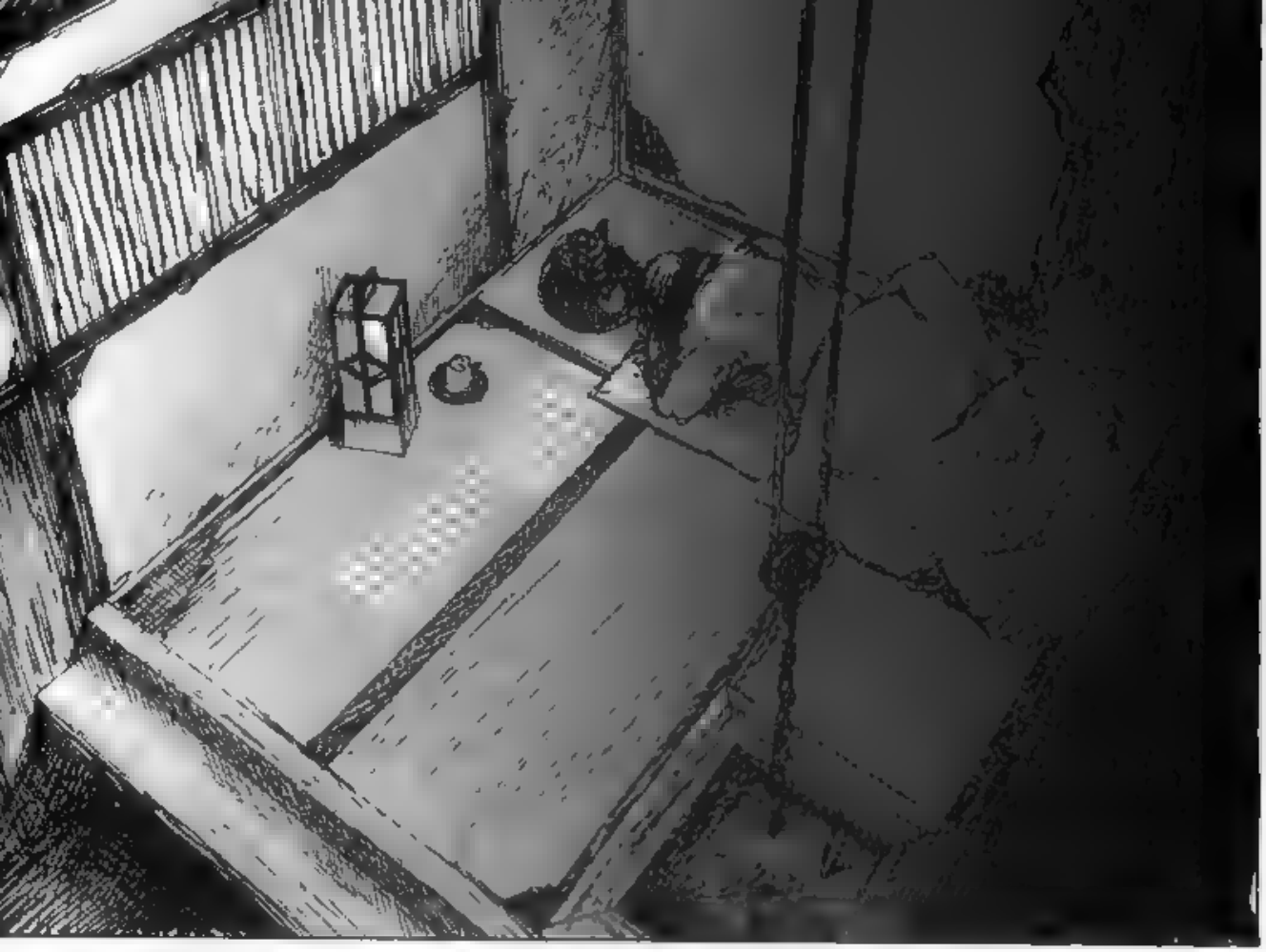
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR *MIND*... ?!
WHAT'S *THIS* SUPPOSED TO ACCOMPLISH ?!
IF GANGRENE SETS IN, YOU'LL NEVER AGAIN BE ABLE TO--

I DON'T *CARE* IF I CAN'T!
NO... *NO!* THAT'S HOW IT *HAS* TO BE!
IT... IT *HAS* TO, OR... OR YOU'LL NEVER SEE ME AS JUST...
...JUST A *PERSON.*
LIVING, DYING...
OH, KAGEHISA-*SAMA*...! I...I'VE FAILED AT *EVERY-THING.*


KILLING, SPARING...
HATING, FORGIVING...
EVERY-THING!





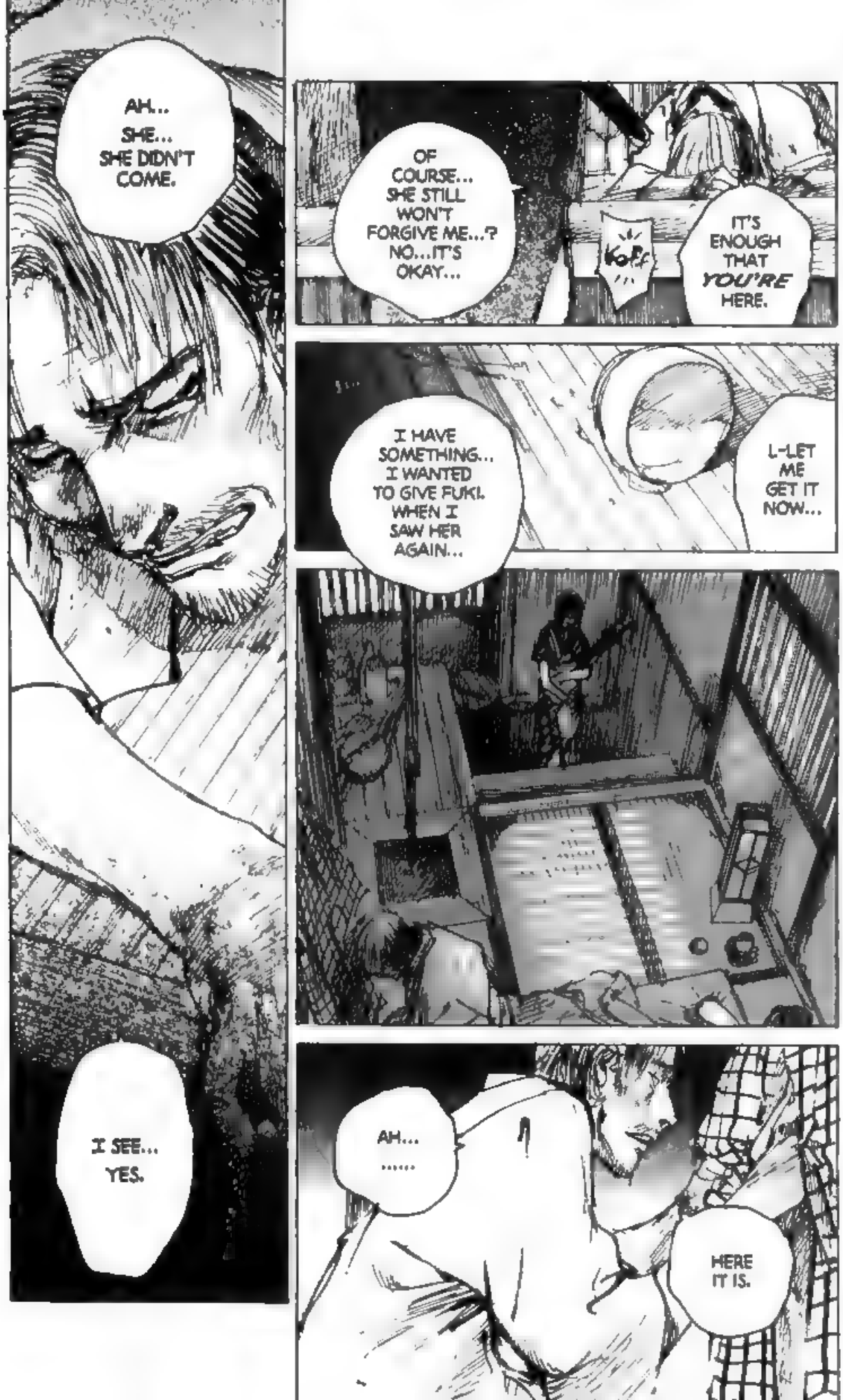


kcff
kcff

?!
WHO IS IT?!
HELLO, FATHER.

EH...?
.....
.....
MAKIE...?
ARE YOU... MAKIE?
.....
.....
YES.
NNG...
.....
AAH... NO...
C-CAN IT BE...?
M... MAKIE...?!

HOW... HOW DID YOU FIND ME?!
:kofi!:
:kofi!:
ANOTHER DREAM...?
...RIGHT?!
F... FUKI...? FUKI'S WITH YOU...
...ISN'T SHE, MAKIE...?
YOUR MOTHER IS WITH YOU...


AH...
SHE...
SHE DIDN'T COME.
I SEE...
YES.
OF COURSE... SHE STILL WON'T FORGIVE ME...? NO...IT'S OKAY...
KO!
IT'S ENOUGH THAT YOU'RE HERE.
I HAVE SOMETHING... I WANTED TO GIVE FUKI. WHEN I SAW HER AGAIN...
L-LET ME GET IT NOW...
AH...
.....
HERE IT IS.

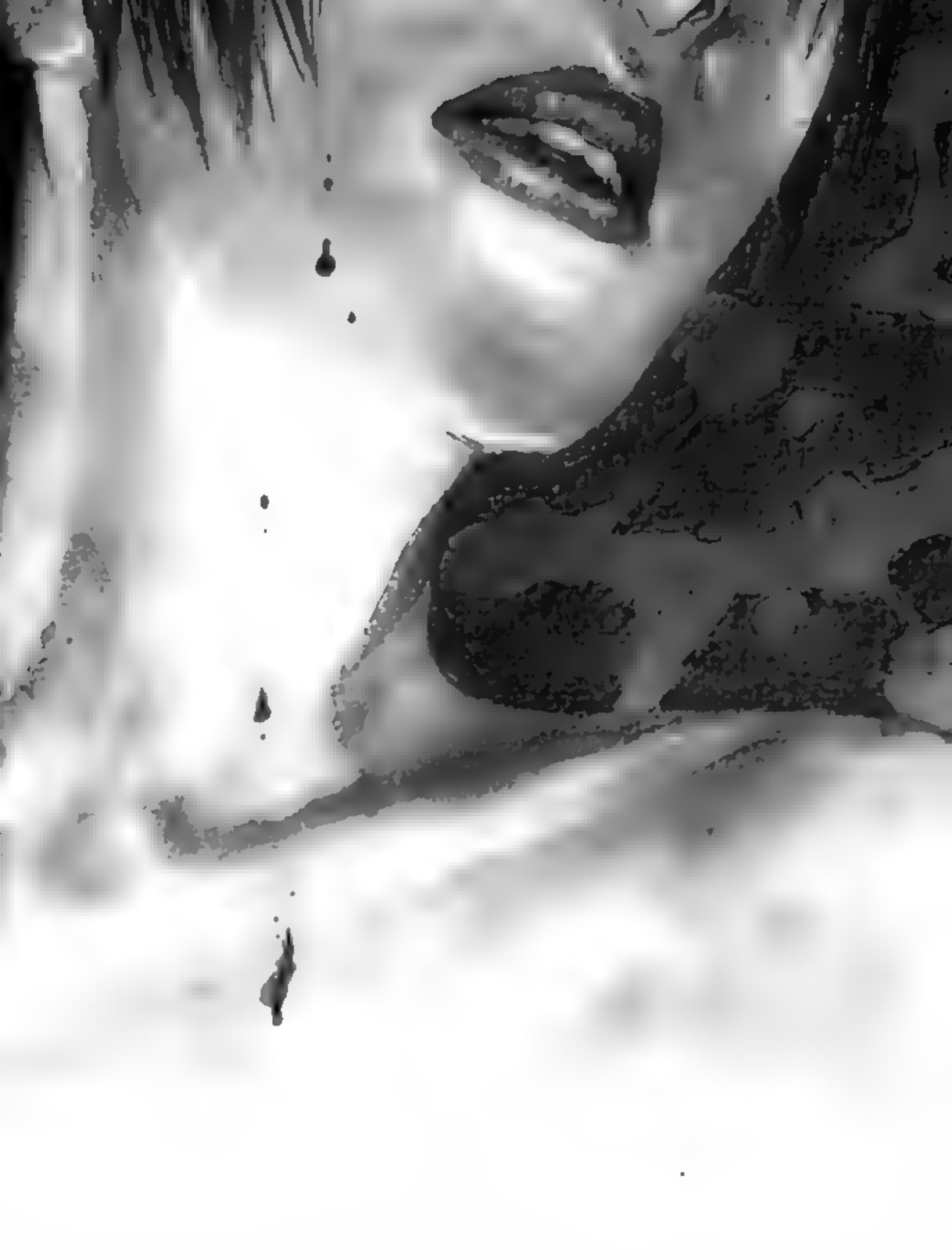
SHE WORE IT IN HER HAIR... THE DAY WE WERE MARRIED.
IT'S A FINE THING, MOTHER OF PEARL INLAY...
IT'S ALL BLACK WITH CAMELIA OIL NOW
.....
.....
I...I SOLD EVERYTHING ELSE TO GET MONEY, BUT...
...I COULD NEVER LET THAT GO.

HA HA HA...! FUNNY, ISN'T IT...?
IT WAS FATE WE LOST YOUR BROTHER.
AND AFTER YOU AND YOUR MOTHER WENT AWAY, I BROKE WITH THE MUTENICHI-RYŪ.
I WANTED TO START A SCHOOL OF MY OWN... RUN MY OWN DŌJŌ. BUT... IT DIDN'T WORK OUT.
koff
AND NOW... SEE HOW I'VE FALLEN.
STOP IT.
I WAS WANDERING THROUGH THIS TOWN WHEN CONSUMPTION STRUCK ME.
ALONE... ALONE ALL THESE YEARS. I KNOW I BROUGHT IT ON MYSELF... I KNOW IT WAS SELF-CENTERED OF ME, BUT... BUT...
THERE WASN'T A DAY GONE BY I DIDN'T DREAM YOU'D SOMEHOW HEAR ABOUT ME, AND COME HELP.
STOP IT!!
AHH... WHAT A GOOD CHILD. YOU ARE SUCH A GOOD CHILD!

FATHER
...?

THIS COMB... I'LL TAKE IT.
AND I PROMISE... I'LL GIVE IT TO MOTHER.
ALONG WITH YOUR WORDS.
OHH... ?!
OHH! YOU WILL?!
HA HA... MAKIE!
YOU'VE GROWN UP SO BEAUTI-FUL... JUST LIKE HER!
NEXT TIME YOU COME, I'LL BUY YOU A COMB JUST LIKE HERS!
SO GROW YOUR HAIR OUT, MAKIE!

OH! AND HAVE FUKI COME WITH YOU! YES!
THAT WOULD BE GOOD! GOOD! THERE ARE THING'S I'VE WANTED TO TELL YOU BOTH, FOR TWENTY YEARS...
SO MANY THINGS...
A MOUNTAIN OF THINGS!



MIRROR OF THE SOUL

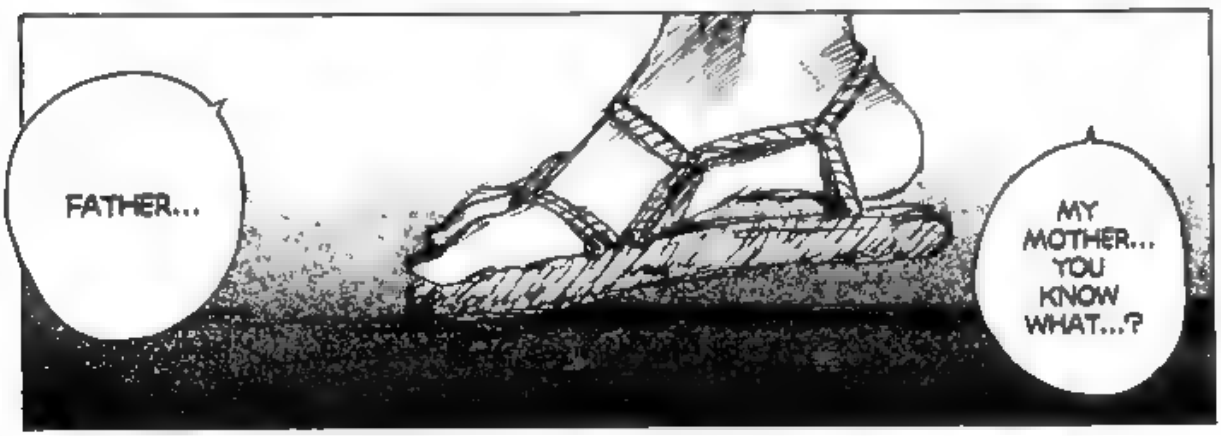
Part 3

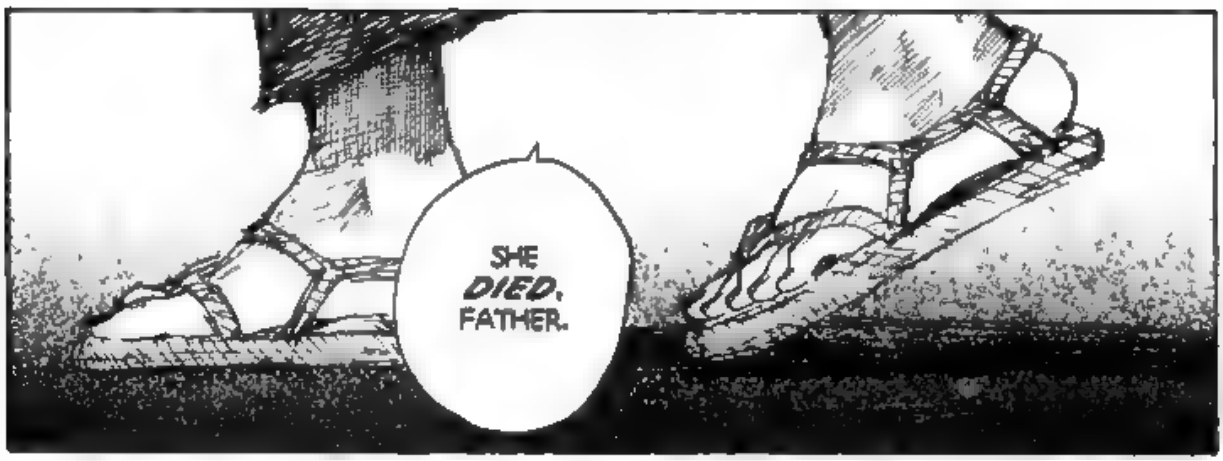
FATHER...
I... HAVE TO GO NOW.
?!
YOU'RE... YOU'RE *LEAVING*? ALREADY...?!
D-DON'T BE IN SUCH A *RUSH*...! W-WAIT!
EAT SOMETHING FIRST! I'LL MAKE SOME-THING...

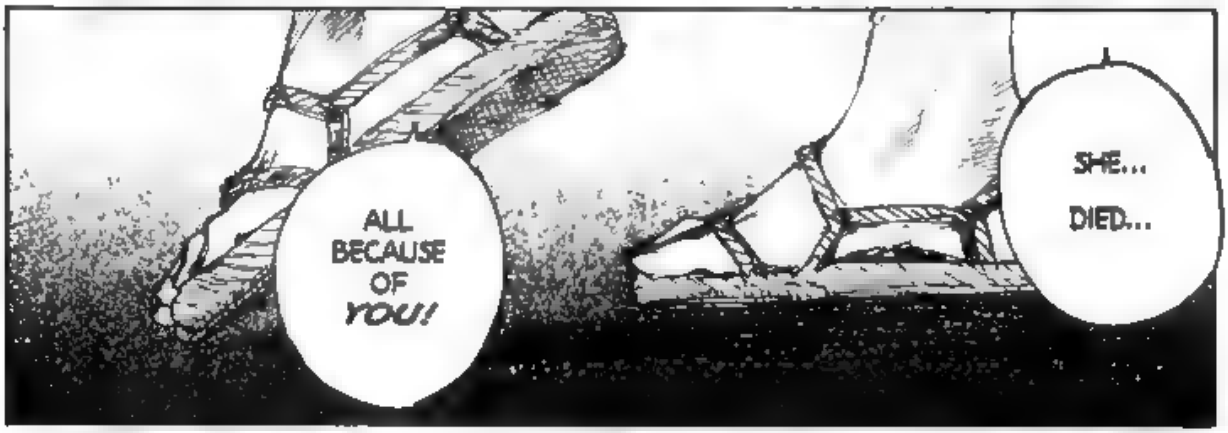
MAKIE!
IF... IF YOU'RE REALLY LEAVING... PROMISE ME.
WHAT YOU SAID...
HAVE FUKI...
...COME BACK TO ME...

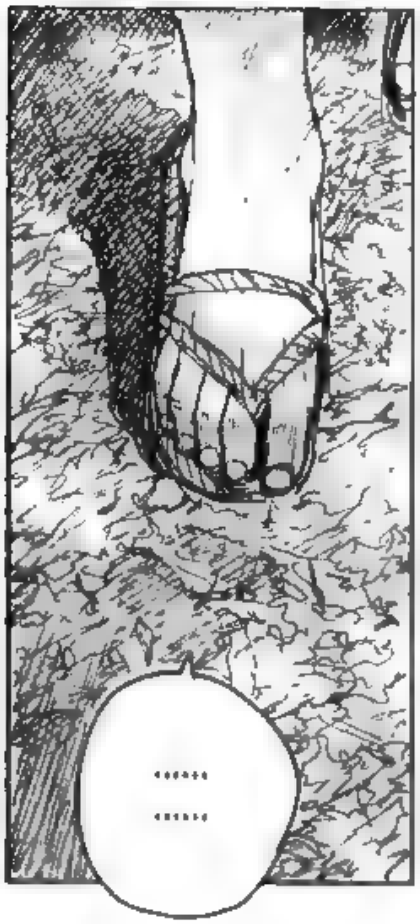
YES.
ABSOLUTELY. I...

...I'LL BRING MOTHER. TO THE VILLAGE WHERE MY FATHER LIVES...


FATHER...
MY MOTHER... YOU KNOW WHAT...?


SHE
DIED,
FATHER.


ALL
BECAUSE
OF
YOU!
SHE...
DIED...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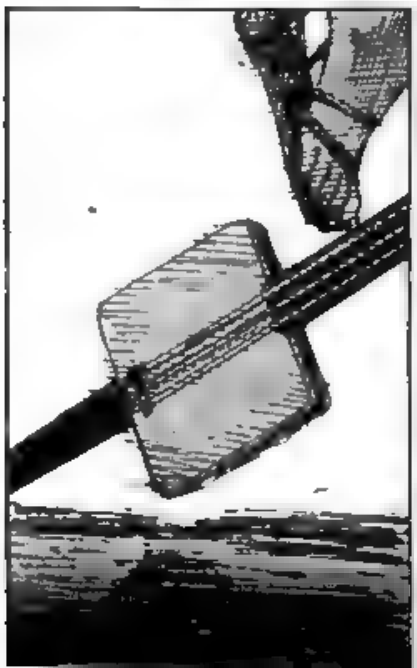


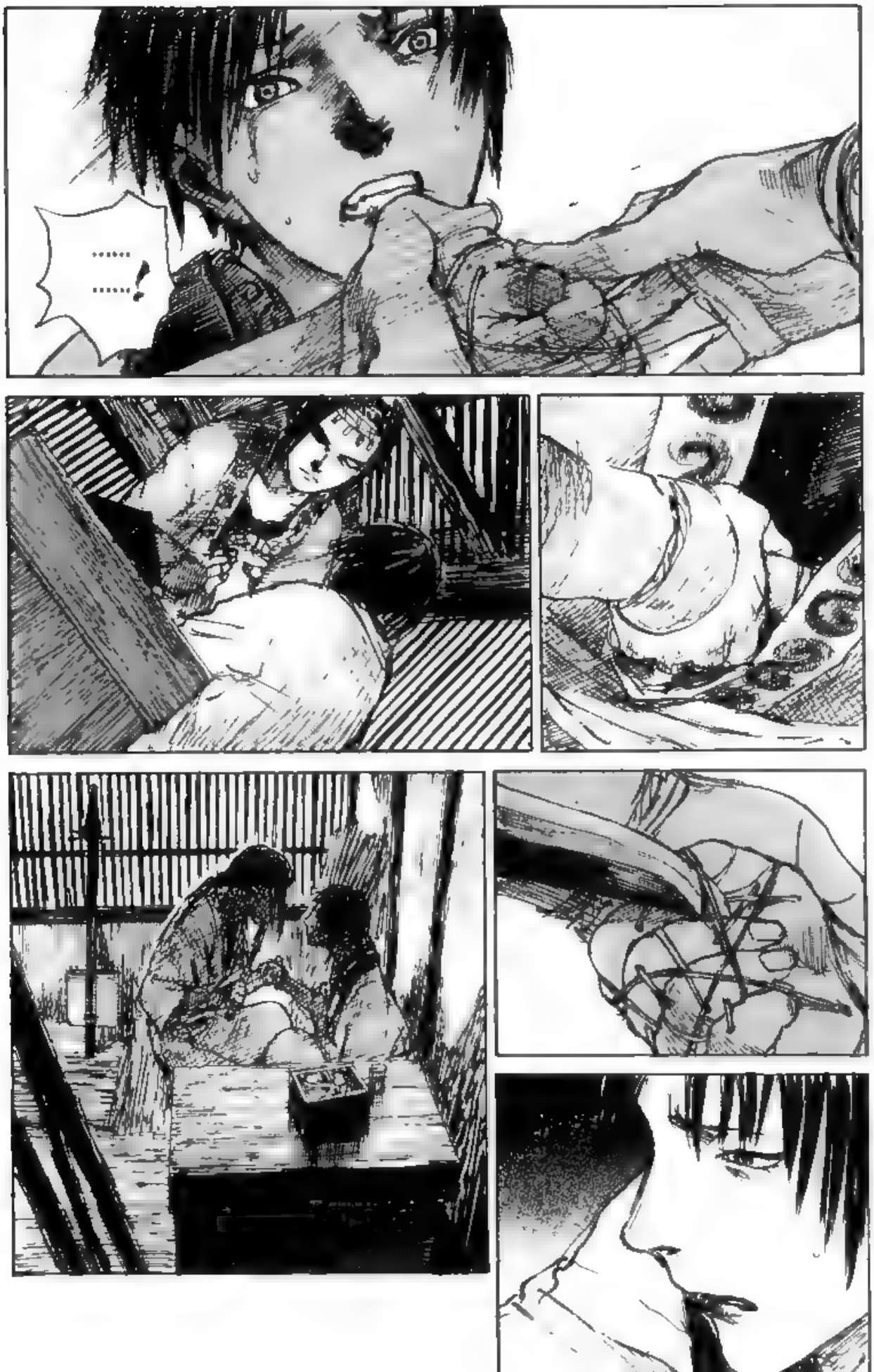
BAM

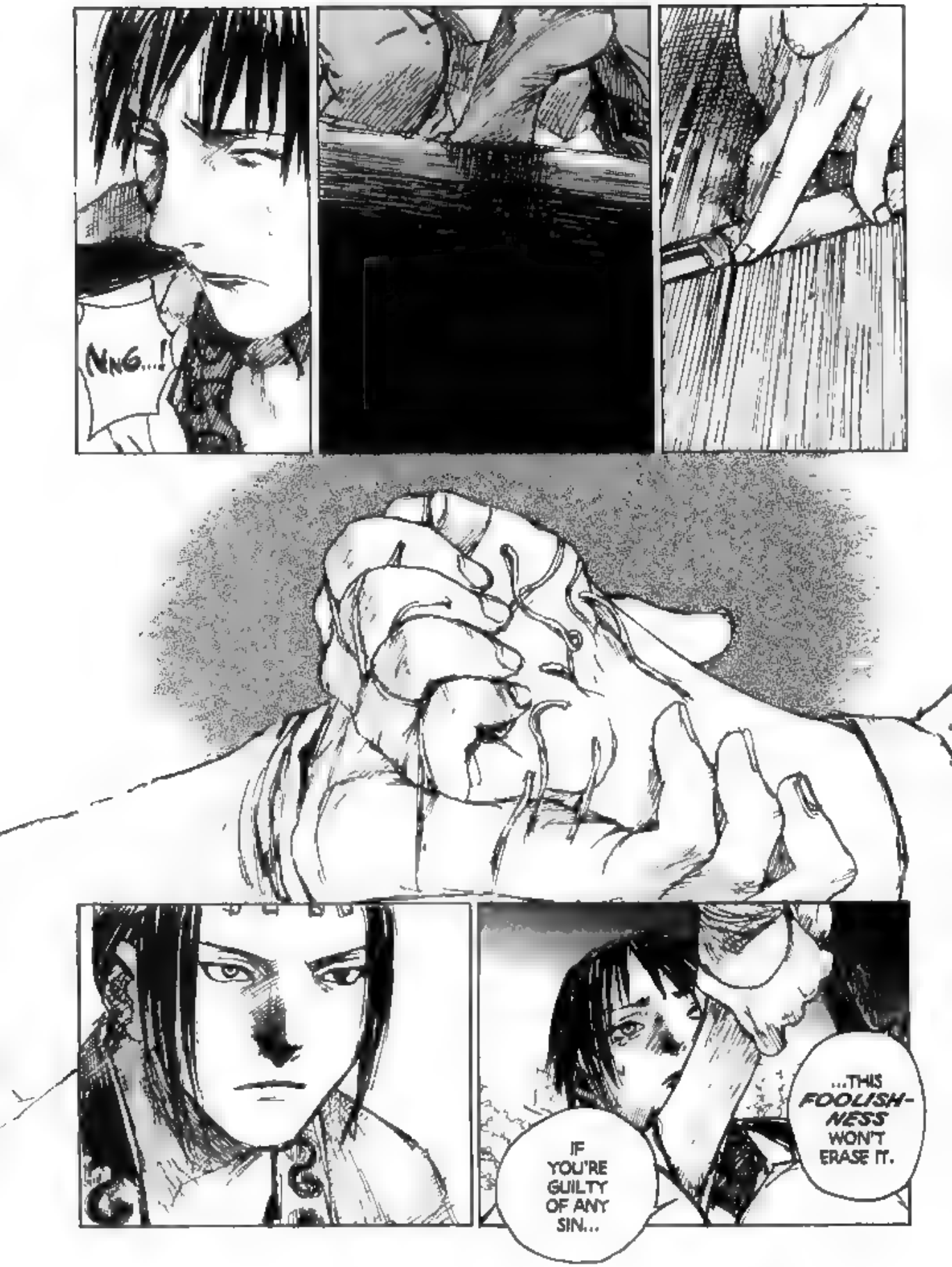
.....
.....
Ани
;sniff;
.....
.....

I SHOULD NEVER HAVE GONE THERE. AND IF I *HAD* TO GO...
...I SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE HESITATED. NOT ONE *MOMENT*.
AT THAT INSTANT...
...THE LAST REASON, THE *ONLY* REASON I COULDN'T PUT DOWN THE SWORD...
...*VANISHED*.

I...I'D PLANNED, AFTER KILLING HIM...
...TO KILL *MYSELF*. THEN AND THERE.
MY *MOTHER*, MY BROTHER, ALL THOSE OTHER INNOCENT PEOPLE...
NEVER *DESERVING* THE MISFORTUNE I BROUGHT THEM. THE MISFORTUNE MY *BLADES* BROUGHT THEM...
BUT THOSE *BLADES*...
OH, *GOD*... THIS *HAND*...
AND THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON I *SHOULD* HAVE KILLED...
...AND MY *HEART* THREW IT ALL AWAY.

SUCH A HOPELESS... FOOL OF A WOMAN. FADING AWAY LIKE THIS... NEVER SAVING ANYONE'S SOUL, PURGING ANYONE'S SINS...
...NEVER ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING AT ALL. IT'S SO...
SO MISERABLE. SO... TERRIFY-ING.
.....
.....
.....




NNG...!
IF YOU'RE GUILTY OF ANY SIN...
...THIS FOOLISHNESS WON'T ERASE IT.

WE ARE KENSHI! ONLY THE SWORD CAN PAY FOR THE SINS OF THE SWORD!
ACCEPT IT! YOU'VE CROSSED THE LINE... STEPPED INTO THE WHIRLPOOL.
YOU CAN'T TURN YOUR BACK ON THE WORLD, OR PLAY THE CRIPPLE. YOU NO LONGER HAVE THAT RIGHT!
AND SHOULD YOU TRY... INDEED, YOU DO NOT DESERVE TO LIVE!

THIS HAND... NEARLY TEN DAYS SINCE YOU BOUND IT?
THE CORDS WILL HAVE HEALED TO YOUR FLESH.
BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CRY OR SCREAM, I WILL NOT STAY MY HAND.
IF I TEAR THEM OUT, YOUR BODY WILL BE...
...RACKED WITH UNSPEAK-ABLE PAIN.
GRIP THESE SHOULDERS, AND ENDURE.

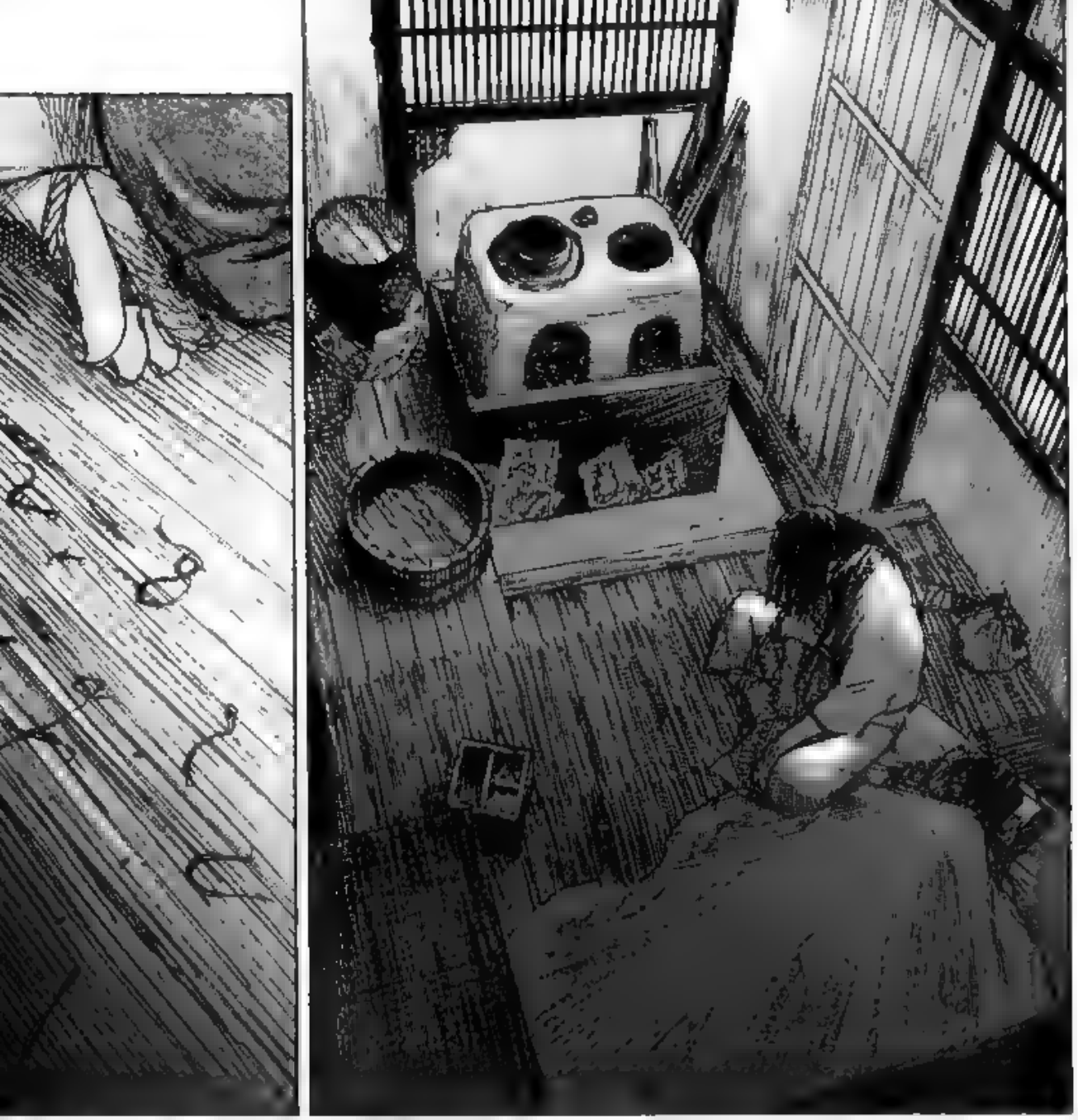
CONSIDER EACH *WAVE* OF PAIN AS YOUR *PENANCE*...
...FOR ALL YOU PLUNGED INTO SORROW.
.....
.....
.....
ARE YOU READY?

NNG...
.....

AAH!
AH...
PFF!
PAAN!

AH!
.....
.....
HNN...
OH...
OH!
NNGK...
AUGH!

AKU...
UUU...
NNG...



MY FIRST AND GREATEST MASTER...
I WILL NEVER FORGET THE DAY YOU SHOWED ME...
...FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME...
...THE BEAUTY OF THE STRONG.
I WILL NEVER, NEVER LET IT BE WASTED...
...THAT GIFT ONLY YOU CAN WIELD.

DID YOU GET SOME SWEET POTATOES ...?
YEAH, AND I ATE THEM ALREADY!
I WOULDN'T DREAM OF ASKING EXACTLY WHAT YOU'VE BEEN UP TO, BUT...
...COULDN'T YOU ACT A BIT MORE LIKE A WANTED MAN?!
.....
.....
.....
HERE. YOUR HALF.
WANT IT...?

hank
nff

DON'T TELL ME... THIS GUY... PLANS TO...
...RUN ALL THE WAY TO EDO?!
TH-THERE'S A HUT...
SHOULD WE...?

Y-YOU NEED... TO ASK?
NO. WE KEEP GOING... FAR AS... T-TAKA-YAMA...
?? HIS VOICE ...?!
.....
.....
.....

WHA...?!
WAIT...!
H-HEY, YOU...!
WHAT'S WRONG ?!

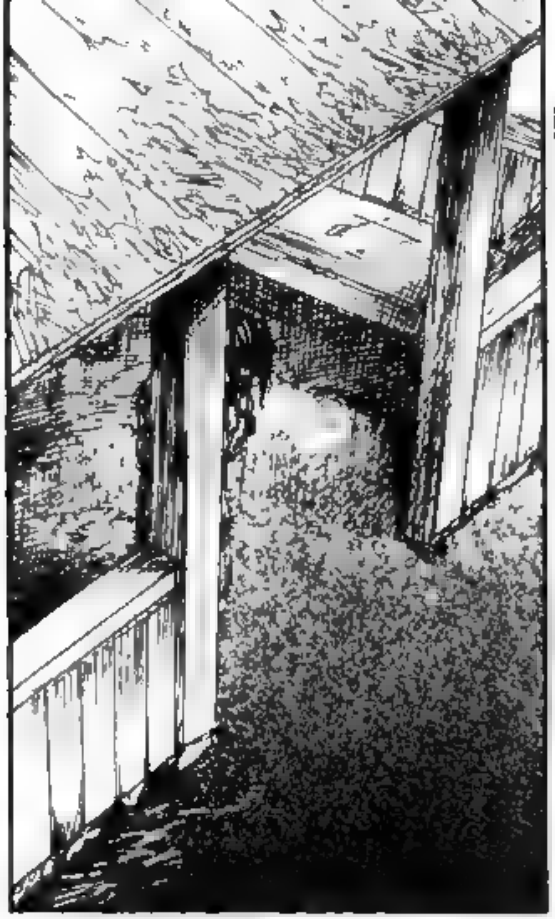
LIGHT AND SHADOW

"TETANUS"
...?!
I...
I BELIEVE SO.

BUT... JUST OUT OF THE BLUE?
OH, I GUESS NOT...
BUT HOW?!
WE ATE THE SAME FOOD... WHY JUST YOU?!
IDIOT! YOU GET TETANUS FROM WOUNDS, NOT FOOD! BUT EVEN SO...
...I STILL SEE NO REASON...
"TWO DAYS AGO...?!"
EH...? WHAT... OH!
NO, WAIT. THERE IS ONE...

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT... THAT LITTLE SCRATCH ?!
YES. I KNOW.
UNLESS YOU'RE INCREDIBLY UNLUCKY, A SWORD CUT SHOULDN'T CAUSE THIS.
BUT THERE IS A WAY TO IMPROVE THE ODDS.
IT WAS A COMMON TRICK, BACK IN THE DAYS OF CIVIL WAR...
"SOAK YOUR SWORD OR SPEAR IN A PIT TOILET OVERNIGHT. WIPE LIGHTLY, AND SHEATH.
"OF COURSE, IT DULLS AND RUSTS THE BLADE.
"BUT IN RETURN YOU GET A DEADLY WEAPON FOR DELIVERING PESTILENCE TO YOUR FOES.
"ON THE BATTLEFIELD, AN ILL OR INJURED FOE CAN BE MORE VALUABLE TO YOU THAN A DEAD ONE.
"THE SICK PERSON TIES UP HIS COMRADES AS WELL."

BUT SUCH TRICKS ARE MEANINGLESS IN A DUEL.
THEY MUST JUST WANT TO GET ME, REGARDLESS OF HOW.
SO... WHAT WILL YOU DO? BACK TO SHIRA-KAWA...?
DON'T BE STUPID! WE KEEP MOVING!
IN YOUR CONDITION? WHO'S BEING STUPID, HERE?
I HAVE TO GET BACK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
THE EVENTS OF THESE LAST FEW DAYS... ALARM ME.
I THINK THEY WANT MORE THAN MY LIFE.
EVEN AS WE SIT, BACK IN EDO...
.....
BACK IN EDO WHAT?
NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, GIRL.



SO. HOW ABOUT IT?
ISN'T THIS THE PERFECT CHANCE...?

IF YOU WANT TO KILL SOMEONE YOU NORMALLY COULDN'T BEAT...
...WHAT BETTER TIME THAN WHEN HE'S *SICK*?

MAYBE SO. BUT... NOT NOW.
I UNDERSTAND NOW, I *REALLY* DO. DAYDREAMS WON'T CUT IT ANY MORE.

I MEAN, HONESTLY SPEAKING? I THINK, IF I TRAINED AND TRAINED FOR TEN YEARS OR SO...
...THEN, PROBABLY... I STILL WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST YOU.
OR, ANYWAY... HEH HEH
...NOT AS LONG AS YOU CAN WALK.
BUT! IF THAT TETANUS STUFF GETS WORSE...
...AND YOU CAN'T EVEN GET UP... THEN... WHO KNOWS?
I'M IN NO RUSH. I'VE GOT LOTS OF TIME...
NO POSING ANY MORE... JUST WAITING. THAT'S ME.
HMM. AN HONEST GIRL.

AH...!
.....
.....

UM...
YOU
OKAY?
HEH
HEH.
YEAH.
YEAH,
GUESS
IT
WOULD.
HEARING
YOU
WORRY
ABOUT ME...
MAKES ME...
REALLY
FEEL LIKE
SHIT.
SO LIKE,
I'M JUST
GUESSING,
BUT...
...DOES
IT HURT
TO
TALK?

THAT'S WHY I CAN TELL IT'S LOCKJAW. AS THE DISEASE PROGRESSES, IT AFFECTS THE... MUSCLES OF THE JAW. EVENTUALLY... WON'T BE ABLE TO TALK AT ALL.
YOU NOTICED ...?
I'VE HEARD OF THAT.
OH... LOCK-JAW ?!
BUT... I DON'T GET IT.
AS I TOLD YOU...
FOR SOMEONE RAISED IN A SAMURAI HOUSEHOLD, YOU SURE KNOW A LOT ABOUT IT. I MEAN, ISN'T IT A FARMER'S DISEASE...?
...IT IS A WEAPON OF WAR. AND I...HAVE STUDIED WAR ALL MY LIFE.
THE CORE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ IS... "WHATEVER WORKS."
SO I...
.....
.....

YES
.....
.....
SILENCE!
LOOK OVER THE RIDGE... BUT STAY DOWN!
BUT WHAT--
-INGAH!-

AREN'T THEY... FROM THE DŌJŌ?!

YES...THE TRUE FACE OF OUR ATTACKERS.
WH... WHAT DO WE DO?
HIDE UNTIL THEY LEAVE?!
.....
.....
NO... H- HOPE- LESS.
FOR... VARIOUS REASONS...
...THEY HAVE NOWHERE TO GO HOME TO.
I'M SURE THEY'VE STAKED OUT EVERY ROUTE... THEY'LL CHASE ME ALL THE WAY TO EDO.
AND AS WEAKENED AS I AM NOW...CAN'T POSSIBLY EVADE THEM ALL.

SOMETIME, SOMEWHERE... I'LL HAVE TO FIGHT.
SO IT MUST TO BE HERE AND NOW... WHILE I CAN STILL MOVE!
BUT... CAN YOU STILL WIN?
I... I DON'T KNOW.
THESE AREN'T MEN I COULD TAKE IN A SINGLE BREATH...
...EVEN AT THE BEST OF TIMES.
AND NOW, IF I FACE THEM ONE BY ONE... I'LL RUN OUT OF ENERGY BEFORE THEY'RE ALL DOWN.
SHEESH... YOU'RE AWFULLY CALM ABOUT IT.
SO... THAT MEANS IT'S HOPELESS?
NO... THERE'S STILL ONE POSSIBLE PATH TO VICTORY.
REMEMBER... WHAT I SAID IN THE CAVE?

...?!
YEAH... THEY FOUND HIS BLOOD ON ONE OF THEIR SWORDS.
NAW. NOT LIKELY.
YOU THINK WE *PASSED* 'EM?

HE AIN'T GONNA BE MOVIN' TOO FAST... NOT WITH LOCKJAW.
AND EVEN IF HE COULD, HE KNOWS WE'D BLOCK ALL THE PATHS TO EDO.
JUST WASTED EFFORT. AND HE DOESN'T WASTE EFFORT, NOT THAT GUY.
.....
.....
GEEZ... TEN DAYS AGO WE WERE JUST RUNNING AROUND ON TATAMI, SWINGING BOKUTO ALL DAY.
HOW'D WE END UP LIKE THIS?!
SEE?! I FRIGGIN' TOLD YOU GUYS!
"THAT DUDE FROM EDO IS BAD NEWS, MAN," I TOLD YA!
WILL YOU ASSHOLES JUST SHUT UP?!
OKAY ...?!
MAN!
NOW REMEMBER! WHEN YOU SEE THE BASTARD, NO SHOWING OFF!
MASS ATTACK! TOGETHER!

THIS ISN'T A DUEL, IT'S A FUNERAL!
WE'VE GOT TO TAKE HIM, OUTCLASSED OR NOT.
OKAY, OKAY...!
GEEZ.
HUH?
WHAT'S WITH THAT BROAD ...?

SHE'S CHECKING US *OUT*, DUDE...THINK SHE *WANTS* SOME-THING?
HEH HEH.. MAYBE SHE'S LOOKING FOR A BOYFRIEND! ♥
.....
.....
AHH?!

I KNOW HER!!

?!
WHY, YOU--!

DON'T JUST *STAND* THERE!
GRAB HER, YOU *IDIOTS!!* SHE'S ANOTSU'S *SPY!!*

WHA--?!
AH?!

AUUGH!

UNG!
.....
.....!
AAH...
AAH!

YOU
LITTLE
BITCH!

WHAT TH--
HUH...?
UH--
AGGH!
WSSH
WH- WHAT?! WHO--

AAA!
...?
EH?
HE CIRCLED AROUND!!
BUT...
WA!--

SPANGG
!!
NNG!
AUGH!

UH...
.....
LET'S GO.
AAH.. RNG.
ANOTSU KAGE-HISA!
THIS ISN'T OVER, YOU BASTARD!
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU... THE MASTER AND THE MISTRESS...
...THEY NEVER WOULD HAVE...

WE'LL FIND YOU! WE'LL GET YOU!
WE'LL KILL YOU, ANOTSU KAGEHISA !!

HMM. YOU SURPRISED ME.
EH?

THAT RISKY STRATEGY... .....
I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D AGREE SO EASILY.

AFTER ALL... IF I COULDN'T KILL THEM ALL, AND THEY GOT ME... WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

WELL, YEAH... THAT'S TRUE. FOR SURE.
SO... WHY, I WONDER? MAYBE...
...'CAUSE IT'D PISS ME OFF!
YOU GETTING YOURSELF KILLED WHEN IT DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MY STUFF!
YOU KNOW... YOU'RE SOME PIECE OF WORK, GIRL.
WHY, THANK YOU, SIR! SO VERY MUCH!

CROSSROADS

OH?!
PLEASE COME IN!
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR...

Y... YOU...?

.....
.....!

HERE. MY SWORD.
UH... UM... YES, SIR!
OH, YEAH. MINE, TOO.

.....
UHM!

A SPLENDID SIGHT...
...ABAYAMA-DONO!

HAHAHA! HERE, HABAKI-DONO... TAKE THIS.
FOR A TOAST!
MY THANKS.

AND SO... ALL GATHERED HERE TODAY, AND *ESPECIALLY* THE GENTLEMEN OF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ!*
WE MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME. I AM *HABAKI IKAGIMURA*, THE NEW *BANGASHIRA*.

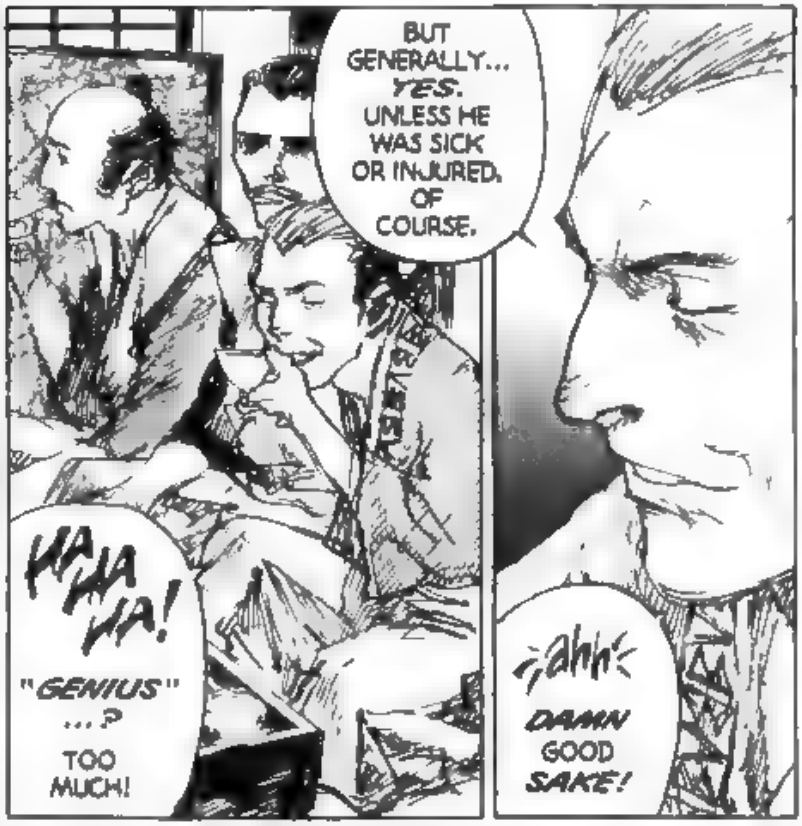
BANGASHIRA: HEAD OF THE *BANSHŪ*.

NOW, IF THIS WAS ONE OF OUR STIFF *BANSHŪ* AFFAIRS...
...I MIGHT *EXPOUND* UPON THE DECLINE OF THE *WARRIOR SPIRIT* THESE DECADES PAST.
BUT...
IT'S ABSURD TO DRONE ON WITH A *FULL CUP* IN MY HAND!
ESPECIALLY WHEN I SEE SOME *CHOPSTICKS* AT THE READY!
HA HA HA!
I DEEPLY REGRET THAT THE ITTŌ-*RYŪ*'S LEADER, ANOTSU KAGEHISA-*DONO*, COULD NOT JOIN US.

YET IF OUR HEARTFELT LITTLE FEAST PROVIDES...
...AN OPPORTUNITY TO STOKE THE FIRES AND FLESH OF YOU WILD WARRIORS, WHAT MORE COULD I ASK?
DIG IN!!
HEY, BIG SPEND-ER! NICE SPREAD!
"BIG SPENDER"...? NOT I. BUT SERIOUSLY, ABAYAMA-DONO...
...IS THIS REALLY ACCEPT-ABLE?
I REFER, OF COURSE, TO THE ABSENCE OF ANOTSU-DONO.

DON'T GIVE HIM ANOTHER THOUGHT, HABAKI-DONO.
IT'S HIS FAULT FOR NOT BEING BACK WHEN HE SAID HE'D BE.
YET... WE COULD HAVE RESCHEDUL-ED...
NO, NO.
WHY WASTE MORE OF YOUR BUDGET? KAGEHISA DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THINGS LIKE THIS.
I UNDER-STAND MANY HAVE DESIGNS ON ANOTSU-DONO'S LIFE.
PERHAPS THIS TRIP AS WELL...?
AND I HEAR YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE WENT TO CONSIDERABLE PAINS WHEN HE LEFT FOR KAGA?
YES. YES... ALL TRUE. HOWEVER...
YOU SEE, HABAKI-DONO... THE REASON WE CAN KICK BACK LIKE THIS AND ENJOY...
...IS BECAUSE WE KNOW OUR BOSS'S SWORD ARM DESERVES ALL THE TRUST WE PUT IN IT.

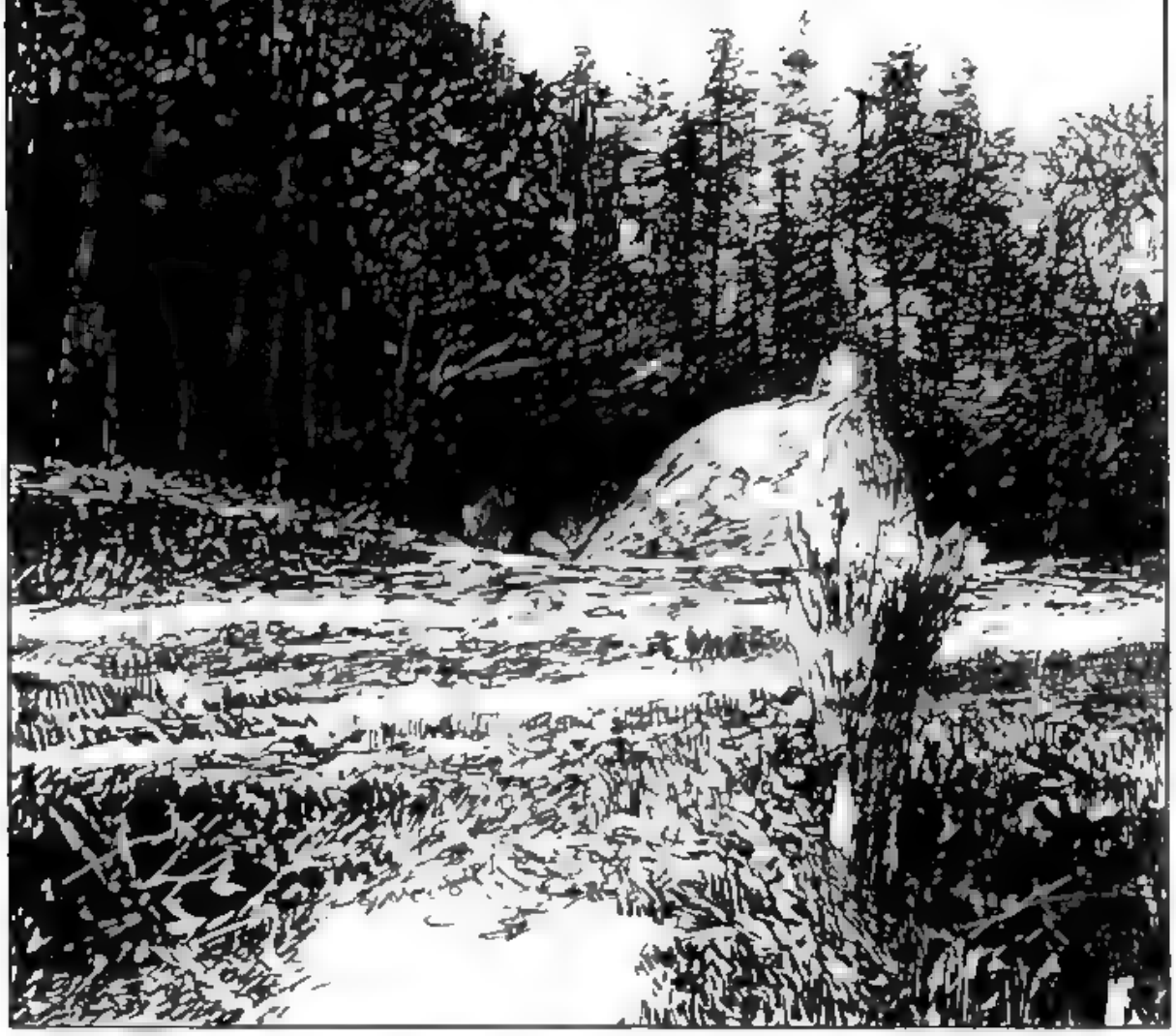
SO, YOU FEEL THERE'S *NOTHING* THE YOUNG GENIUS OF THE ITTŌ-*RYŪ* CAN'T HANDLE?
NOTHING AT ALL...?

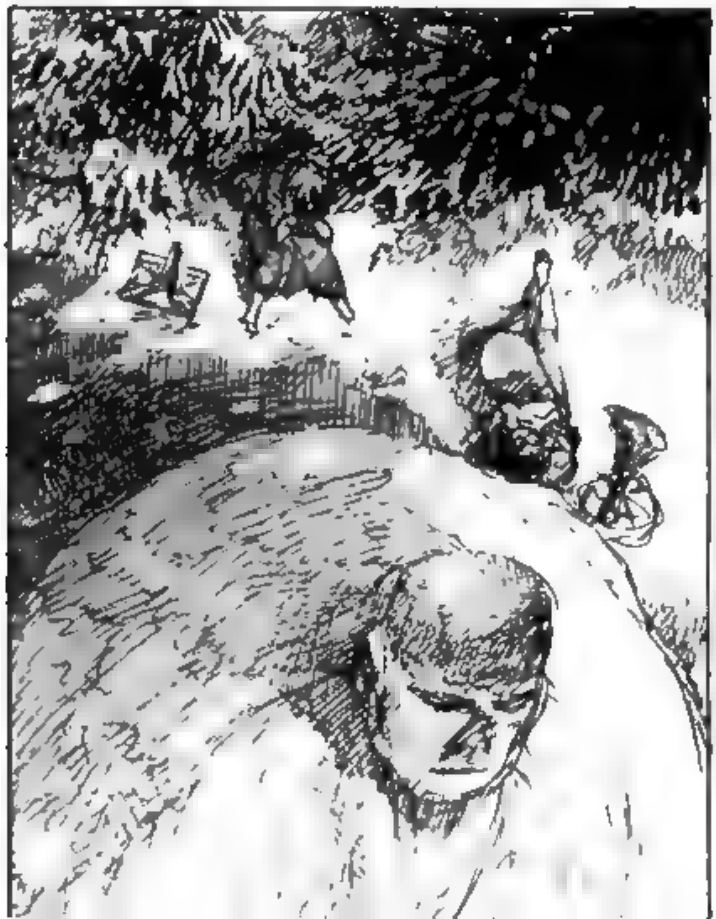

BUT GENERALLY... *YES.* UNLESS HE WAS SICK OR INJURED, OF COURSE.
HA HA HA!
"*GENIUS*" ...? TOO MUCH!
;;ahh;;
DAMN GOOD *SAKE!*

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. I'M ALWAYS GETTING ON OUR YOUNG'UNS CASE ABOUT THAT.
BUT I WAS PRETTY FULL OF MYSELF, TOO, WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.
BY THE WAY... HOW OLD ARE YOU, HABAKI-DONO?
FORTY-EIGHT.
SO YOUNG! I'M SIXTY-FIVE.
HRMM... YES...I SEE. PERHAPS A MEASURE OF COMPLACENCY ISN'T BAD WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG. NO, CERTAINLY NOT!
YET TO STRUT ABOUT IN ARROGANCE WHEN YOUR SKILLS CAN'T BEGIN TO MATCH THOSE OF THE WARRIORS OF OLD APPEARS MERELY... COMICAL.
MUSH-ROOM AND FERN TIP NUTA.
MM... DELI-CIOUS! WHAT IS IT?
HA HA HA!
ANYWAY, THAT'S WHY--HOH? WHERE TO?
EXCUSE ME... THE BATH ROOM.

Suhaaa~

MAKOTO!
ON THE HOUR. EXACTLY.
TELL GIICHI.





HUH... SO MUCH FOR THE GREAT LEADER OF THE ITTO-RYŪ
CATCHES A BUG, AND HE'S DOWN LIKE THE REST OF US.
COUPLE DAYS AGO HE COULD STILL FIGHT.
AND NOW HE CAN'T EVEN WALK WITHOUT MY HELP.
DARN IT... .....
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO NEEDS A REST...
?
WHAT? YOU WANT ME?

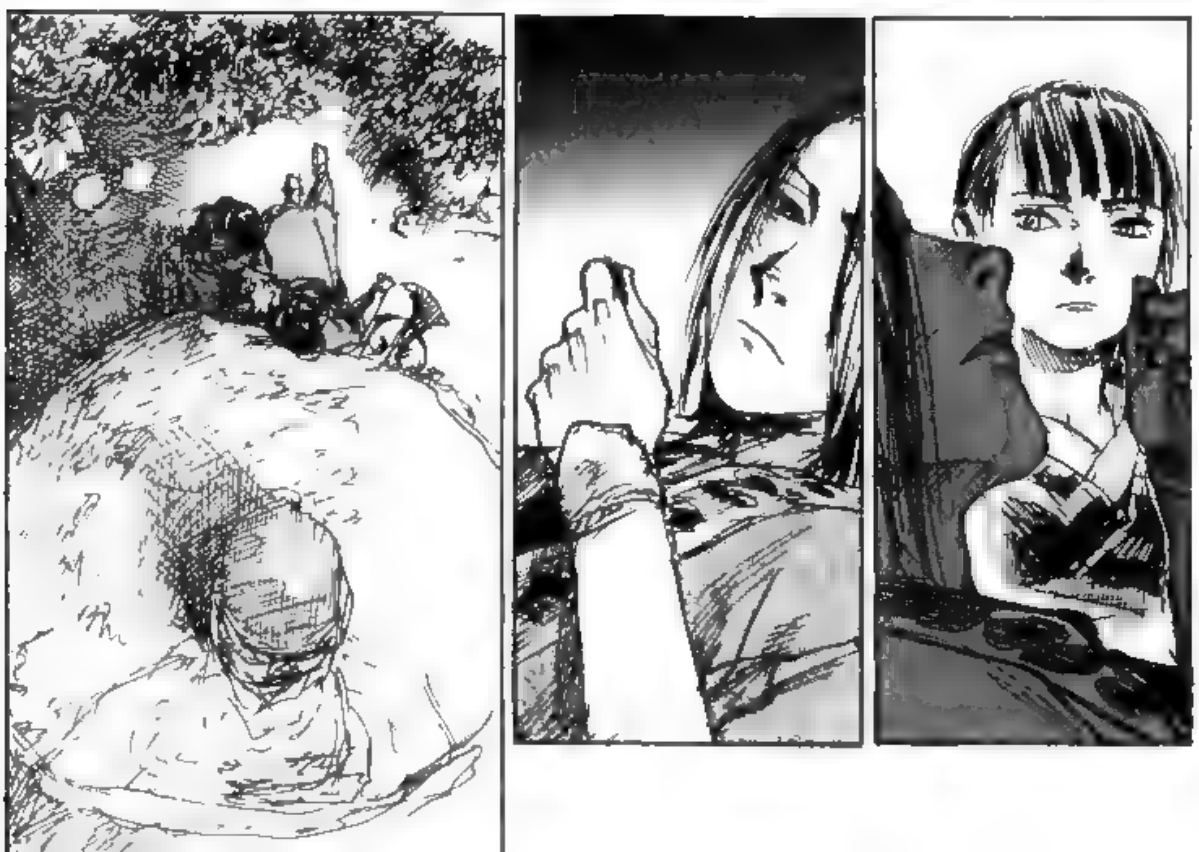
"WHY"...
"NOT"...
"WHY NOT KILL ME?"
OH. HMM... GOOD POINT.
HOW DO I PUT THIS...? MAYBE...
"I MISSED MY WINDOW OF OPPOR-TUNITY"...?
I MEAN, KILLING SOMEONE WHO CAN'T EVEN STAND UP...?
IT JUST SEEMS KIND OF SLEAZY, YOU KNOW?

.....
.....
.....?
HERE.
YOU'VE DRAGGED THAT SICK BODY OF YOURS ALL THE WAY TO *SUWA*.
YOU'VE DONE *REALLY* WELL.

BUT IT'S OVER, RIGHT? YOU'VE REACHED THE END, RIGHT? YOU'LL NEVER RECOVER FROM THAT DISEASE UNLESS YOU GET SOME DECENT FOOD AND SHELTER.
BUT WE CAN'T EVEN USE A FLOPHOUSE OR THEY'LL TRACK US DOWN.
AND YOU'LL STILL HAVE TO FIGHT THEM, SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, BEFORE WE REACH EDO.
WILL YOU WIN THIS TIME? I DON'T THINK SO. YOU CAN'T EVEN SWING YOUR AXE!
NOW, THIS STUFF...
...IT'S NOT MEDICINE.
IT'S BUSU.
BUSU: A PO SON. EXTRACT OF MONKSHOOD

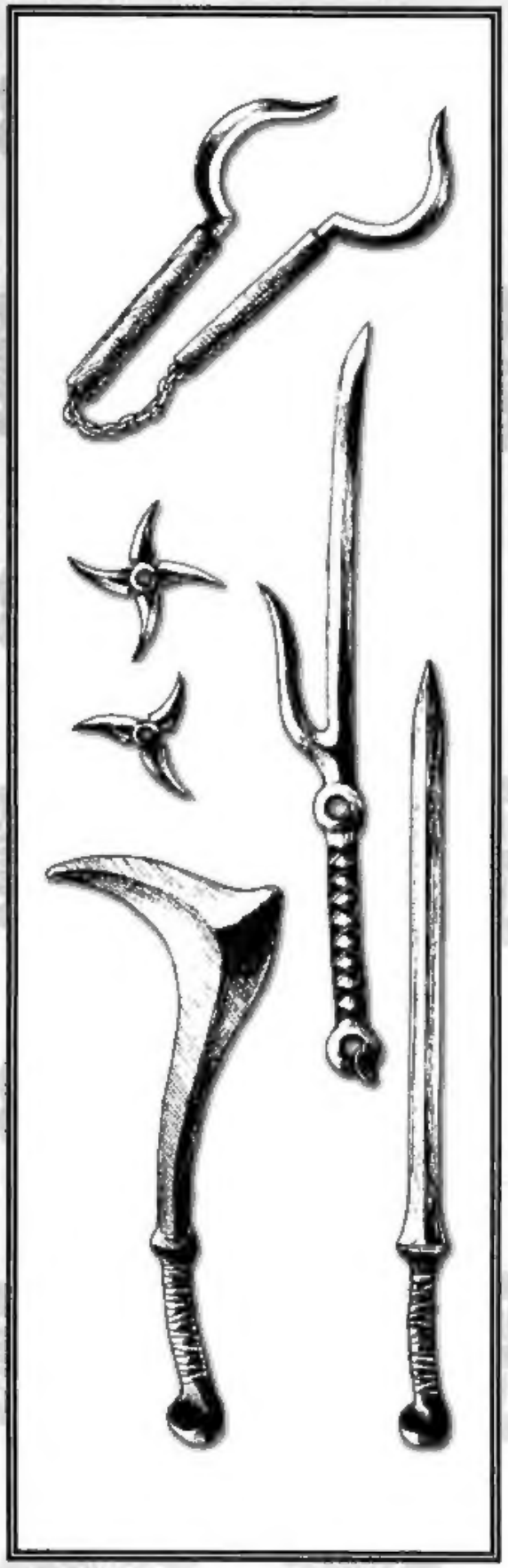
FRIEND OR FOE, I THINK ANYONE WHO'S BEEN PUSHED THIS FAR...
...AT LEAST DESERVES THE CHOICE.

.....
.....



GRASSH
HEH... YOU'RE HOPE-LESS...!
SO BE IT! THEN I'LL WATCH OVER YOU... TO YOUR END.
TO BE CONTINUED...

GLOSSARY



bakufu: a military arm of early Japanese government, concerned primarily with military and police matters. Also referred to as the "tent government," because soldiers lived in tents.

bangashira: head of the *banshū*

banshū: officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo castle to defend the Shogun himself

bokuto: a sword made of wood

busu: a poison made by sun-drying the root of the *torikabuto* (Monkshood) plant

dōjō: a hall for martial arts training; here centers for swordsmanship

dono: a very polite honorific indicating much respect

han: a feudal domain

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

Kaga: a remote feudal domain on the Japan Sea coast southwest of Edo

kenshi: a swordsman (or swordswoman), not necessarily born into the samurai caste

kōkenjo: sword school established by the Shogunate

Mutenichi-ryū: the sword school led by Rin's father

nuta: a Japanese dish mixing fish or vegetables with miso, rice vinegar, sesame seeds, and other ingredients

ri: old Japanese unit of measurement equivalent to 2.44 miles

ryū: a sword school

shihan: a respected, official instructor

tatami: a thick, rice straw mat used as flooring in traditional Japanese households, still commonly found in at least one room of a residence even today

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

Anotsu Kagehisa, master swordsman and leader of the rogue Ittō-ryū dōjō, has sheathed his blade for the moment to join in marriage. But for a man of action such as Anotsu, the formal traditions of feudal Japan can be just as tense and fraught with hidden dangers as the battlefield. And while Anotsu may indulge in a moment of peace, his enemies are not at rest, among them Rin, who has stalked him for years to avenge the murder of her parents at the hands of the Ittō-ryū. Anotsu had best make sure that if he stops to smell the flowers, he doesn't end up losing his head!

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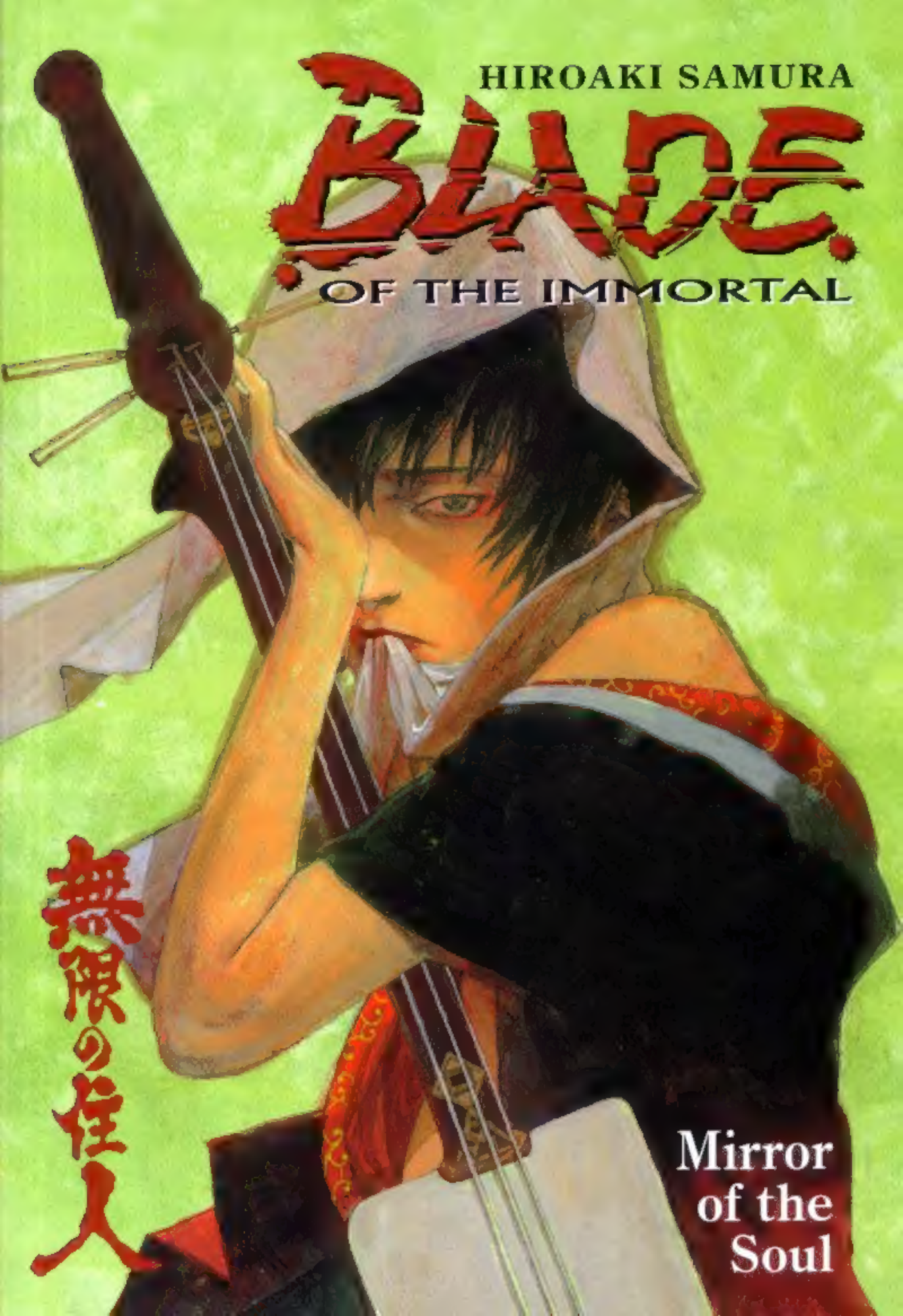

Mirror of the Soul